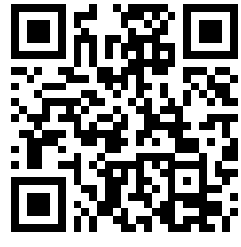
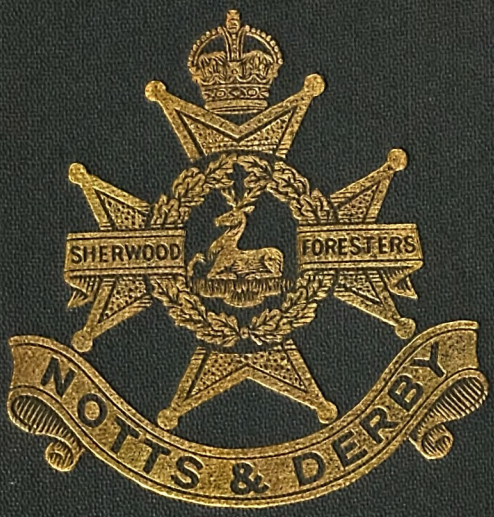
This is a reproduction of a library book that was digitized by Google as part of an ongoing effort to preserve the information in books and make it universally accessible.

Google™ books

https://books.google.com



NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES
3 3433 11485 3314



Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

THE 1ST AND 2ND BATTALIONS

THE SHERWOOD FORESTERS

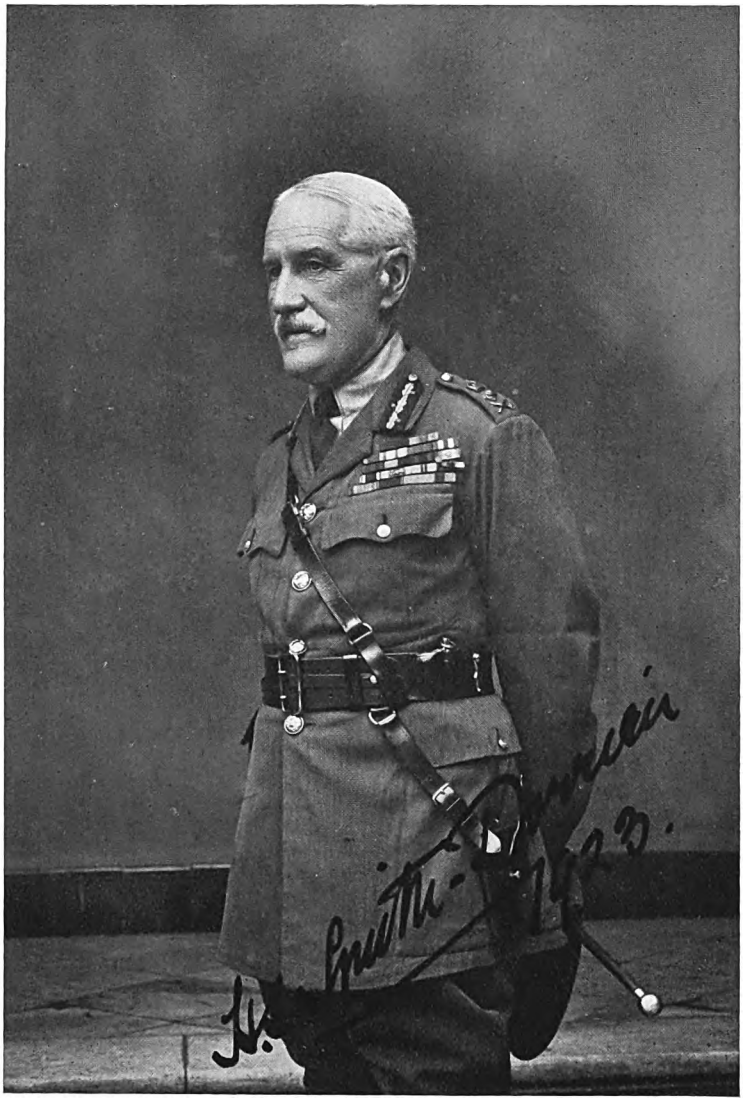
(NOTTINGHAMSHIRE AND DERBYSHIRE REGIMENT)

IN THE GREAT WAR

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google



Photo] *[Freyone, Gibraltar.*

GENERAL SIR HORACE L. SMITH-DORRIEN, G.C.B., G.C.M.G., D.S.O.

THE COLONEL OF THE REGIMENT.

Digitized by Google

THE 1ST AND 2ND BATTALIONS

THE SHERWOOD FORESTERS

(NOTTINGHAMSHIRE AND DERBYSHIRE REGIMENT)

IN THE GREAT WAR

COMPILED BY

COLONEL H. C. WYLLY, C.B.

(Late of the Regiment).

"Thank Him who isled us here and roughly set
"His Briton in blown seas and storming showers.
"We have a voice with which to pay the debt,
"Of boundless love, and reverence and regret,
"To those Great Men who fought—and kept it ours."

—*Tennyson.*

Printed and Published for the Regimental Committee by

GALE & POLDEN, LTD.,
WELLINGTON WORKS, ALDERSHOT
ALSO AT LONDON AND PORTSMOUTH

NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
193382A
ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS
R 1935 L

Digitized by Google

FOREWORD

TRULY a Regimental History—just so much of the General Campaign and situations in the whole theatre of war as will enable any reader to follow the rôle of the two Battalions; the indescribable bravery of individuals, and the dogged determination which inspired all ranks.

Before perusing its pages I had intended to write a long preface calling attention to the salient incidents, but having read it and found such "salients" on every few pages, I have thought it better to recommend readers to miss none of it.

I make this recommendation as I feel sure that in this way—and this way alone—can they grasp the full significance of the appalling situations and the undaunted spirit with which they were met, and be thrilled and inspired by the unselfish heroism, and touched to the core by the pathetic descriptions of death and destruction in (to quote from the History) "the most terrible war that has ever scourged mankind."

By a careful study it will be realized what units and individuals had to face throughout those four unique years of continuous strife, intensified to such a terrible degree by modern inventions of the most villainous and devastating description—lives in chronic danger—deafening and incessant explosions—destruction all round them from land and air—the agonies of poisonous gases, and, if not victims themselves, the nerve-racking experience of comrades killed or mutilated by their side.

Readers cannot fail to come to the conclusion that soldiers in the Great War proved to be almost superhuman. They will also gather from the story how the earnest training of the years immediately preceding the war had borne fruit by encouraging the development of initiative and individuality, thus breaking away from the old rigid discipline, when thinking for himself or acting without a direct order from above was a crime in a subordinate.

They will only fully realize the successful results of this training on reading how, when seniors became *hors de combat,* junior officers, non-commissioned officers and even privates leapt into the breach, and—assuming command—saved many a critical situation.

These gleanings are bound to hearten any Britisher by the thought that with such material the Empire need have no fear in the future, so long as her affairs are guided by statesmen and not by politicians.

Thrilling and wonderful as it is as a record of pluck, endurance, high military training and leadership, this story of the two Battalions of the Sherwood Foresters in the Great War of 1914—1918 is typical of the behaviour and experiences of most of the British units who fought to prevent the world being dominated by an arrogant, unscrupulous and grasping military power.

As readers peruse these pages, I am sure that the same thoughts will pass through their minds as have passed through mine; and those are mainly admiration for, and astonishment at, the superb bravery and toughness of the human

Digitized by Google

race. Who would have believed it possible that troops could have endured such appalling punishment, and such misery and discomfort, from the enemy and weather, day after day, without losing their nerve? But they did it, and were always ready to go in again, one may almost say "smiling," in spite of their being worn out with fatigue, often wet and chilled to the bone, rifles and themselves soaked and choked in mud, in the full knowledge that their companions of a few hours—or even moments—before, had either paid the Great Sacrifice or been grievously wounded, and that their own turn must almost inevitably come soon.

When one thinks that time after time both Battalions were reduced to mere skeletons, almost all their officers, many of their best non-commissioned officers, and 60—and once or twice over 80—per cent. of their rank and file killed or wounded; and yet were not only able to carry on the duties of the Battalions, but to present a fighting front to the enemy, one may well feel proud to have been born a member of the British Empire.

In these four years the two Battalions suffered casualties (I have counted the "missing" as "killed") to the extent of 117 officers and 2,587 other ranks killed; and 192 officers and 6,184 other ranks wounded; a total of 9,080.

What an appalling record! And the wonder is that others were always forthcoming to fill their places, and though most of the reinforcements lacked previous military experience, so splendid was their spirit and so keen were they to uphold the safety of the Empire and the reputation of their Regiment, that they never once failed to act up to the highest traditions of the glorious fighting reputation of the Sherwood Foresters.

Truly anyone—and especially a Forester—who reads this History must be proud ever to have been associated with such men. How much more do I feel pride in being the Colonel of such a Regiment.

The writing of a popular Regimental History is no easy matter, and in this gigantic war, every day of which produced something important to relate, and in which so many of the principal actors fell, and at times whole records were lost, the compilation was beset with very great difficulties. In one particular, perhaps, the story of our two Regular Battalions has not been quite so complicated as that of some units which served in several theatres of war, for they were both in the main theatre throughout the campaign.

This graphic account, to my mind, is the beau ideal of what a Regimental History should be, and we may be proud that the Author, already so well known as a Military Historian, was himself a Sherwood Forester, and one who led our 1st Battalion to victory in the Boer War.

Colonel H. C. Wylly, C.B., has always devoted himself to the welfare of the Regiment, but I regard this work, necessitating months of research and labour, as the crowning gift to his beloved old Corps, and I take this opportunity of thanking him in the name of the Regiment, and of congratulating him on the immense success of his voluntary efforts. He has, I am glad to acknowledge, been unstintingly assisted by a hard-working committee over which Brigadier-General J. W. G. Roy, C.M.G., presided, consisting of Major C. D. Harvey, D.S.O., representing the 1st Battalion, and Lieutenant-Colonel F. Tomlinson, O.B.E., M.C., the 2nd Battalion; all of whom bore their share in the war, the

Digitized by Google

last-named being one of the 30 mentioned in the History as the only ones in the Battalion who never missed a day of the war. He indeed was a tower of strength to his Battalion, and the fact that all ranks spoke of him as "Tommo" is proof of the affection in which he was held. I thank them all, and also Captain F. E. Jones, M.C., who devoted so much of his time to tracing and piecing together valuable information at the War Office.

But, of course, our main thanks are due to the Author, who has always been and still is, the greatest bulwark of *esprit de corps* I have ever known in the Regiment. His very name to all ranks, whether they know him personally or not, is a symbol of sympathy and sound advice to all who seek it, and of unselfish labour for the good name of his old Regiment.

If every regiment had a "Harold Wylly" there would be no fear of its members, past or present, being without a friend, or of its glorious records being lost sight of by neglect. The story told by him so clearly describes the great battles as well as individual acts of initiative and heroism, that I purposely omit direct mention of them here, for where all did so brilliantly and where so many showed leadership of the highest order, and bravery beyond imagination or description, it would be invidious to mention any names in particular. On page after page one finds incidents which simply thrill one, and pathetic stories of the highest form of good comradeship and of lives sacrificed *pro Patria*, which touch the innermost depths of one's heart.

They are not dead, but sleeping,
Our loved ones are at rest
Safe in their Father's Keeping
They rest—He knoweth best.*

H. C. Smith-Dorrien
General
Colonel of The Sherwood
Foresters

* William Branton.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

CONTENTS

THE 1ST BATTALION.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	The Opening of the War	1
II.	1914-1915—Neuve Chapelle, Aubers Ridge, and Loos	8
III.	1916—The Battle of the Somme	27
IV.	1917—The Third Battle of Ypres	41
V.	January to June, 1918—Villers Bretonneux and the Chemin des Dames	53
VI.	June to December, 1918—The Second Battle of Arras—The End of the War	66
VII.	1919—Flanders and England	81

THE 2ND BATTALION.

I.	The Opening of the War—Alma Day, 1914	91
II.	January, 1915, to July, 1916—Hooge and the Ypres Salient	108
III.	1916—The Battle of the Somme	122
IV.	January to July, 1917	133
V.	August to December, 1917	146
VI.	1918—The Great German Offensive and the Battle of the Somme ...	157
VII.	1918—The Closing Battles and the End of the War	169
VIII.	1918 and 1919—The March into Germany—Demobilization—The Return of the Cadre	189

APPENDICES.

I.	Battle Honours for the Great War	201
II.	Victoria Cross, Orders of the Bath, St. Michael and St. George, Distinguished Service Order, Military Cross, Foreign Orders, Mentions and Promotions—Officers	202
	Distinguished Conduct Medals, Military Medals, Foreign Awards—Other Ranks	207
III.	Our War Memorial	211
IV.	Memorial in the Chapel of the Royal Military College, Sandhurst ...	215

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

ILLUSTRATIONS

General Sir H. L. Smith-Dorrien, G.C.B., G.C.M.G., D.S.O., The Colonel of the Regiment ... ... *Frontispiece*

FACING PAGE

German Barbed Wire, Beaumont Hamel 32

Mine Crater, Beaumont Hamel 32

A Trench in High Wood after Bombardment 34

Bridge caused by a Fallen Tree 34

Sailly Saillisel 38

Delville Wood 38

On the Amiens–St. Quentin Road, March, 1917 42

Hyde Park Corner, Ploegsteert Wood 50

Shell Bursting in Square of a Belgian Town 50

Dinners being carried to Front Line Trenches 58

The Mud of Flanders 58

Working Party Assembling 64

Communication Trench Through a Wood 74

Reception of 1st Battalion Cadre at Nottingham 86

Boche Front Line opposite left sector, Houplines 108

Houplines Road looking towards Armentières 108

Panoramic View of Ypres 114

A Line of German Strong Posts near St. Julien 118

Vlamertinghe 118

Ginchy 126

Lens, North End 142

A Party on the Menin Road 154

Rue de Lille, Armentières 162

Kemmel Hill 170

The War Memorial 211

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

MAPS AND PLANS

No.

1. General Map of the Western Front ...
2. The Aisne and Chemin des Dames ... ...
3. Ypres and Armentières ... ...
4. Béthune, Arras and Amiens ... ...

} *In pocket at end.*

FACING PAGE

5. Neuve Chapelle, March, 1915 16
6. The Fighting about Oppy, August, 1918 70
7. Engagement on the Chemin des Dames, September 20th, 1914 96
8. Engagement at Ennetières, October 20th, 1914 102
9. Action at Hooge, August 9th, 1915 112
10. The Quadrilateral, September 13th, 1916 124
11. Action at Lens, July 1st, 1917 140
12. Battle of the Hundred Days and March to the Rhine, 1918 ... 190

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

THE FIRST BATTALION IN THE GREAT WAR

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER I

THE OPENING OF THE WAR

WHEN in the late summer of 1914 the Great War commenced which most soldiers had envisaged, in the possibility of which many people had refused to believe, but for which during the past few years the Army had been silently and strenuously preparing, the 1st Battalion of our Regiment was completing the fifteenth year of its tour of foreign service and might, in the ordinary course of events, have been looking forward to an early return to the United Kingdom, since the Battalion was actually under orders to proceed during the next cold season to Aden, usually the last station to be occupied by a British infantry unit during its final year of Indian service. The Battalion had arrived in the country in December, 1906, from Singapore, and in August, 1914, was quartered at Bombay, with a wing at Deolali.

The Indian Army List for July gives the following distribution of the officers of the Battalion: Colonel W. R. Marshall, officiating in command of the Bombay Brigade, *vice* Major-General Gorringe, on leave; Majors C. R. Mortimore and L. St. H. Morley; Captains M. B. Webb (Deolali), H. B. T. Hume (Deolali), and M. K. Hodgson; Lieutenants R. L. Sherbrooke, J. H. M. Douglas (Deolali), J. A. M. Lang (Deolali), MacL. P. Dilworth, H. E. F. Wyncoll (Deolali), G. S. Dobbie, R. H. Stranger (adjutant), A. H. Jackson, and J. P. Wylie; Second-Lieutenants C. S. C. Kennedy, J. E. A. O'Dwyer, and E. M. Williamson (Deolali). Hon.-Lieutenant J. Wright was quartermaster.

Major M. P. Phelps, Captain W. D. S. Brownrigg, Lieutenants A. J. Goodwyn, G. H. Chambers, and G. D. Mills were at home on leave; Captains W. H. Wilkin, W. Swinhoe-Phelan, and Lieutenant R. D. Squires were at the Regimental Depot; Captain S. M. Castle was away on the staff; Captain H. B. Dixon was a student at the Quetta Staff College; while Lieutenant R. B. Young had not yet joined.

To those who were at home in the months of July and August, 1914, events seemed to move with extraordinary rapidity, while to such Englishmen as at that time were stationed in India the sudden transition from peace to war must have appeared to be almost bewildering. The heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary was murdered on June 28th, but although the Dual Monarchy did not present an ultimatum to the Serbian Government until July 23rd, within no more than a fortnight of this date practically the whole of Europe was at war. The statesmen of Great Britain had done their best to prevent, or at least to localize, hostilities, and in this country at any rate all had hoped and believed that even at the eleventh hour peaceful counsels might prevail; but no sooner was war declared upon Germany than there came from all quarters of the world evidences of United Empire. "During the past few weeks," so ran the words of a Royal

Digitized by Google

Message, " the peoples of My whole Empire at Home and Overseas have moved with one mind and purpose to confront and overthrow an unparalleled assault upon the continuity of civilisation and the peace of mankind."

From no part of the Empire did the call to arms receive a readier response than from India; the princes buckled on their swords; upwards of seven hundred of the mightiest among them placed the whole of their resources—their treasuries, their troops, their lives—at the disposal of the King-Emperor, and India's wonderful and whole-hearted answer at once dispelled the Kaiser's foolish dream of revolt in the East.

But splendid and full of promise for the issue of the war as were the offers of troops and treasure which hourly came in from India, the Dominions and the Crown Colonies, it was primarily to the Regular Army that the British military authorities looked to check the initial attack by the Central Powers and to form a shield behind which new armies might be raised and trained, new weapons designed and perfected. The all-important need at the outbreak of the war was to bring home as many as could be spared of the well-trained veteran troops forming the garrison of British India, replacing them by battalions and batteries of the second line, the officers and men of which might be expected to volunteer for foreign service in their stead.

In August, 1914, there were fifty-two battalions of British infantry serving in India and Burma—seventeen in Bengal, fourteen in the Punjab, twelve in Bombay, six in Madras and three in Burma. Before the war was two months in progress ten of these battalions had sailed from India for Europe, some with the two divisions composing the Indian Army Corps, some journeying to join the 8th Division then mobilizing for service on the Western Front; before the year 1914 came to a close fifteen more battalions had sailed for one or other of the many theatres of war; so that when the year 1915 opened there were little more than a dozen regular British infantry battalions remaining in India, the place of all those which had left having been taken by battalions of the Territorial Force. These reliefs had been carried out without any interference by the naval forces of Germany and her allies having been so much as attempted.

So rapidly did events move, and so little had any outbreak of war been expected by the units of the British Army serving in India, that as late as July 17th notification was received that the 1st Bn. Sherwood Foresters would embark for Aden, in the ordinary course of relief, on November 27th in the hired transport *Rewa,* the port of embarkation being Bombay; but during the next few days the happenings in Europe caused these peace-time arrangements to be cancelled and others of a more warlike character to be substituted. Thus on July 31st, under instructions from Army Headquarters, the Battalion was ordered to assemble at Bombay, which was to be placed in a state of defence owing to the imminence of war on the Continent and the likelihood that the British Empire would be involved in the general conflagration. Orders were given to move at 7 a.m., and the remaining companies stationed at Deolali left there to rejoin headquarters at 1 a.m. on August 1st.

At midnight on August 4th the time-limit named in the ultimatum presented to Germany by the British Cabinet expired, and a state of war between these two nations having thus automatically come into existence, the defences

Digitized by Google

of Bombay were placed on a war footing, and the Battalion furnished four companies for duty at outlying forts and also detailed detachments for duty at the docks and telephone exchanges, guarding vital points and keeping a special watch upon enemy shipping, guards being provided on the German vessels *Rheinfels* and *Wurtma*. In addition the usual preparations were made for active service, and all ranks of the Battalion were medically inspected.

For the week ending August 8th the Battalion was on duty as under:—

"A" and "G" Companies, under Lieutenant Sherbrooke, were on duty in the docks; "D" Company, under Captain Hodgson, was at Elephanta; "F," with Major Morley, was on the forts and Fort at Colaba; a guard was found by "G" on Butcher Island wireless station, while "B," "C," "E" and "H" were in reserve at Colaba with orders to be ready to move out at once and take up a line across the Island of Bombay, cutting off the native quarters from the city along the Carnac Road; Captains Webb and Hume were in charge of this line.

As the days went by officers and men began to wonder whether the war would be won without their assistance, or whether, if they proceeded at all to the front, they would arrive "in time"—anxieties which those of the Battalion who had taken part in the South African campaign remembered to have oppressed them in those far-off days; and these anxieties were by no means set at rest by the orders which from time to time were received for the attachment of officers and men to other corps and units, stated on the usual "best authority" to be upon the eve of proceeding with all speed to the theatre of war in Europe. On August 20th Captain Castle, Lieutenants Dobbie and Dilworth left for Poona for attachment to the 2nd Bn. Dorsetshire Regiment, under orders for embarkation, while on the same date Sergeant Dady and five men of the Battalion were sent away to join a field ambulance with the expeditionary force leaving India for the front. The first-named of these arrangements was, however, later cancelled, and these officers rejoined Headquarters.

And after such manner the days of August went disappointingly by, until at long last, on the 31st of the month, telegraphic instructions were received from Simla directing the Battalion to prepare to embark for passage to England; actually only 48 hours' notice was given, during which time the various detachments had to be relieved, ponies and traps to be disposed of, and an officer of the relieving regiment wrote home saying "the regiment we relieved left Bombay in a great hurry, and we found ponies and saddlery in the stables, motor bicycles and other things which they had no time to dispose of before they sailed." And on September 2nd "the Old Stubborns" marched down to the docks and embarked in the British steamship *Thongwa*. At 5.15 that afternoon Lord Willingdon, the Governor of Bombay, accompanied by Lady Willingdon, Major-General Gorringe, who had come out from home on August 28th in the *Salsette*, and his staff arrived to say good-bye. When the Governor's party left, General Gorringe remained behind and had intended to address the Battalion, but the noise of embarkation was too great for him to make himself heard, and he committed his remarks to paper, and these were later communicated to all ranks. They ran as follows:—

Digitized by Google

"I wished to have had the opportunity of saying a few words of farewell to you before you left my command, but time has not permitted to do so. First of all I wish to say how very glad I am that this opportunity has been given you of going home, before the end of your tour of foreign service, to take your share in this great war which our Empire is now engaged in, and also how much I regret that I am losing you from my command. During the year and nine months you have been under my command you have as a Regiment carried out the various duties entrusted to you with marked smartness and efficiency.

"To you, Colonel Marshall, I am indebted for your loyal help and assistance at all times in command of your Battalion and of the City Section of the Defences and when acting for me in command of my Brigade. To you and all I express my hearty thanks for your ready and efficient co-operation at all times. You have while under my command had work to carry out in connection with the defences, and in helping the Civil authorities, which has made considerable calls on you; these duties have always been well and cheerfully done. At the same time your efficiency for war in the field has been maintained. It was my pleasure to report to your Colonel, Sir H. Smith-Dorrien, when I saw him in England, the high state of efficiency you are in. You will now have an opportunity of putting this training to the test. I am confident that, given the opportunity, the result will add further laurels to the honour of your Regiment. Do not forget when you go on active service all you have been carefully taught in Company, Wing and higher training—your duties as regards keeping yourselves fit, first aid, etc.—of all these instructions you will now reap the benefit.

"In conclusion I can only wish you with all my heart Godspeed, Good Luck and the best of all success in the operations you will shortly be called on to carry out."

The following kindly message was received by Colonel Marshall from Lieutenant-General Sir A. A. Barrett, K.C.B., K.C.V.O., Commanding the 6th (Poona) Division):—

"I am delighted to hear that the Sherwoods are to have a look-in after all; no one could have deserved it better, and I feel sure they will acquit themselves nobly as they have always done before. I am very sorry to lose the Regiment from Bombay, where they have done so well under trying circumstances. I am afraid I cannot get down to say good-bye, so will you kindly do this for me. Wishing you all the best of luck."

Curiously enough, the *Thongwa* was commanded by Captain Irwin, who was the 4th officer of the *Jelunga,* which carried the Battalion to Malta from England in 1898!

The transport moved out into the stream the same afternoon, finally commencing her westward voyage—the beginning of a still longer one for many of her passengers—at 9 a.m. on September 3rd.

The Battalion embarked at a strength of 18 officers, 45 warrant officers and sergeants, 36 corporals, 15 drummers, and 885 privates.

The officers embarking were: Colonel Marshall, Majors Mortimore and Morley, Captains Castle, Webb, Hume and Hodgson, Lieutenants Sherbrooke,

Digitized by Google

Douglas, Lang, Dilworth, Wyncoll, Dobbie, Miller and Wylie, Second-Lieutenant Williamson, Lieutenant and Quartermaster Wright, and Captain Howell, R.A.M.C., in medical charge.

The *Thongwa* was not a very speedy vessel, since she took exactly seven days to reach Aden from Bombay; nor was she either especially well-found or comfortable, for her coaling had been so faultily conducted that the coal had all to be re-stowed during the voyage by fatigue parties furnished by the troops; while provisions were not plentiful and there was a serious shortage of tobacco and cigarettes, the deficiency not being made good until the transport arrived at Gibraltar, where all ranks were at last able to supply themselves with a brand of smokes appropriately labelled "Gem of the Ocean!" From Bombay to Aden the *Thongwa* was escorted by the destroyer *Dartmouth,* from Aden to the northern exit of the Suez Canal by the *Black Prince,* and from Alexandria, where the transport joined a fleet of 35 vessels, all except herself on the way to the southern ports of France, by the *Indomitable.* From Gibraltar the vessel containing the Sherwood Foresters proceeded unescorted and without incident or hindrance direct to England, only being stopped once in the Bay of Biscay by a French cruiser, carrying on homewards after she had made her name or number.

Plymouth was reached at noon on October 2nd, and disembarkation was commenced at 7 a.m. on the following day, the Foresters being welcomed on the quay by the band of the 3rd Battalion of the Regiment which was here quartered. Here were also Captain Brownrigg, Lieutenant Stranger, and other officers, and here news was received of the many casualties suffered by the 2nd Battalion at the Battle of the Aisne, and of the deaths of many brother Foresters. The women and children on board were landed first and sent off at once by rail to their homes, while the Battalion—all in khaki drill and shorts and Indian helmets—proceeded in two trains at 10 and 10.30 a.m. to Romsey, marching thence a few miles out, where it was accommodated in a camp at Hursley Park, near Winchester, and now found itself in the 24th Brigade of the 8th Division, formed almost entirely of battalions withdrawn from Indian and Colonial garrisons, the Division being commanded by Major-General Davies. The 24th Brigade contained the 1st Bn. Worcestershire, 2nd Bn. Northamptonshire, 2nd Bn. East Lancashire Regiments, and the 1st Bn. Sherwood Foresters; the Brigade Commander was Brigadier-General Carter. The officers and men were allowed to go away by wings on four days' leave.

At first sight the camp in Hursley Park seemed almost ideal, but it lay rather low, and after the first week it rained almost continuously, and the climate and surroundings were anything but pleasant for those just arrived from India. All the same an intensive training was at once commenced, the Battalion was re-armed with the new rifle and sword bayonet, while the four-company organization, adopted some time previously in the infantry battalions of the Army serving at home, was now introduced in the Sherwood Foresters, when the eight existing companies were re-organized as follows:—

"A" and "D" Companies became "A" Company,
"B" and "C" Companies became "B" Company,

Digitized by Google

"E" and "H" Companies became "C" Company,
"F" and "G" Companies became "D" Company,

while the following were the Company Commanders and senior non-commissioned officers of the new double-companies:—

"*A*" *Company*.—Captain S. M. Castle, Company Sergeant-Major Brearley, Company Quartermaster-Sergeant Hirst.

"*B*" *Company*.—Captain M. B. Webb, Company Sergeant-Major Raynor, Company Quartermaster-Sergeant Blanchard.

"*C*" *Company*.—Captain H. B. T. Hume, Company Sergeant-Major Cockbill, Company Quartermaster-Sergeant Knights.

"*D*" *Company*.—Major L. St. H. Morley, Company Sergeant-Major Pritchard, Company Quartermaster-Sergeant Widnell.

Before the Battalion had left India the Great War had already opened, and the early battles, with the retreat which followed upon them, had already taken place; and while the Foresters had been prosecuting their homeward voyage the battles of the Marne and of the Aisne had been fought. All these operations had been very costly in officers and men, and it was realized that the trench warfare which had now set in could not be conducted without casualties wholly incomparable with those incurred in earlier wars of which the British Army had gathered experience, or which its leaders of thought had studied. All Regular officers serving at home, and not immediately needed for the training of the new levies now beginning to fill the camps springing up all over the country, had been hurried out to France and Belgium to replace the wastage already incurred, and it had been decided to offer commissions to selected non-commissioned officers of the Regular Army.

Five non-commissioned officers of the 1st Bn. Sherwood Foresters were recommended for such advancement, and Colour-Sergeants Whitehouse, Chambers, Muhlig and Wells, and Sergeant Waring were given commissions as Second-Lieutenants early in October, Wells and Chambers being posted to their own regiment, Muhlig to the East Yorkshire Regiment, Whitehouse to the South Lancashire Regiment, and Waring to the Leicestershire Regiment.

About this time Second-Lieutenant Kennedy was attached to the 24th Brigade as Signalling Officer.

The date being now at hand when the 8th Division was expected to proceed to France, four days' embarkation leave was granted by turn to all ranks, and then, on November 4th, early in the morning, orders to prepare to move from Hursley Camp* were issued. The time allowed for preparation cannot be regarded as excessive, for about 2 p.m. the actual marching orders arrived and the Battalion moved out at 2.30 p.m., reaching Southampton Docks at 6.45 that evening, and embarkation on board the s.s. *Cardiganshire* at once commencing. The following are the names of the officers and senior warrant and non-commissioned officers who embarked with the 1st Bn. Sherwood Foresters to take part in the greatest and most costly of all the many campaigns in which during nearly two centuries it had been engaged:—

* At the gate of Hursley Park, the gate by which the 8th Division marched out to embark for the war, there now stands a Memorial, erected by Sir George Cooper, Bart., and bearing on it the names of all the units that then composed the 8th Division.

Digitized by Google

Colonel W. R. Marshall, in Command; Major C. R. Mortimore, Second-in-Command; Lieutenant R. H. Stranger, Adjutant; Lieutenant J. Wright, Quartermaster; Lieutenant J. H. M. Douglas, Transport Officer; Lieutenant McL. P. Dilworth, Machine Gun Officer; and Captain H. L. Howell, R.A.M.C., in medical charge.

The Company officers were Major L. St. H. Morley, Captains S. M. Castle, M. B. Webb, H. B. T. Hume, H. B. Dixon, M. K. Hodgson, and W. T. Stackhouse; Lieutenants R. L. Sherbrooke, J. A. M. Lang, R. B. Young, R. E. F. Wyncoll, G. S. Dobbie, A. J. Goodwyn, A. H. Jackson, and J. P. Wylie; Second-Lieutenants J. E. A. O'Dwyer, E. M. Williamson, C. R. Chambers, F. Wells, W. M. Smalley, G. S. Shacklock, and J. A. Walker; attached were Captains A. E. Bankhead-Browne (4th Bn. North Staffordshire Regiment), and D. W. A. Campbell (4th Bn. South Staffordshire Regiment).

"A" Company.—Captains Castle and Hodgson; Lieutenants Lang, Wyncoll and Jackson; Second-Lieutenants O'Dwyer and Walker.

"B" Company.—Captains Webb and Dixon; Lieutenants Douglas and Dilworth; Second-Lieutenants Williamson, Chambers and Smalley.

"C" Company.—Captains Hume and Campbell; Lieutenants Sherbrooke, Dobbie and Goodwyn; Second-Lieutenants Kennedy and Shacklock.

"D" Company.—Major Morley, Captains Stackhouse and Bankhead-Browne; Lieutenants Young and Wylie; Second-Lieutenant Wells.

Regimental Sergeant-Major Peterkin, Regimental Quartermaster-Sergeant T. Thorpe, Orderly-room Quartermaster-Sergeant R. Johnson, Orderly-room Sergeant A. Millward, Armourer-Sergeant Wray, Pioneer-Sergeant McCluskie, Transport-Sergeant W. Brown, Shoemaker-Sergeant Pinniger.

The *Cardiganshire* sailed at 1 a.m. on November 5th, and exactly twelve hours later dropped anchor in the harbour of Le Havre, disembarkation beginning almost immediately and the companies marching to No. 6 Camp on the hill above the town.

The Great Adventure had begun.

Digitized by Google

Maps 1 and 3

CHAPTER II

1914—1915.

NEUVE CHAPELLE, AUBERS RIDGE, AND LOOS.

Battle Honours:

"France and Flanders"—"Neuve Chapelle"—"Aubers."

On disembarkation at Le Havre the 1st Bn. Sherwood Foresters marched up to No. 6 Camp, leaving "A" Company and the transport to follow; these joined some few hours later. Here the Battalion was inspected by the Base Commandant, and on the afternoon of the 8th orders were received directing entrainment for the front to take place at 9 a.m. next day at the Gare des Marchandises. This was duly carried out, and the train moved from the station at 12.45 p.m. The destination was stated to be Merville, some 27 miles due west of Lille, but the journey was a very lengthy one, as the line was blocked, and it was well into the afternoon of the 10th before the Battalion finally detrained, and then, leaving the transport and 100 men of "B" Company behind, marched to billets in the village of Neuf Berquin, some three miles from Merville, whence heavy gun-fire in a north-easterly direction was now distinctly audible. The various billets were scattered over about half a mile, the headquarters of the Battalion being at the Ferme de Vasine.

"This is our first experience of billets," wrote Captain Hodgson in a letter home on November 11th, "and we have struck quite a good spot. The place has now been occupied quite recently by all countries, friendly and otherwise. All the farms here are going now again and working smoothly, producing butter and dairy food. They use a dog to work the churn on the water-wheel principle. Our host says the Germans were quite polite, but got nasty if refused anything, and their money was scarce."

During the afternoon of the day following, the Commanding Officer, the Battalion staff and the company commanders all made a trip in motor lorries to the front to visit the trenches and to see something of the new methods of warfare. The point of vantage selected whence the trenches could best be viewed was in the neighbourhood of the village of Fleurbaix, about nine miles east of Merville; but, as soon after the arrival of the party the enemy began heavily to shell the village, a return was made to Neuf Berquin. On this day the long-enduring operations known as the First Battle of Ypres came to an end, and during the winter months which now followed the opposing armies settled down to the static warfare which the weather conditions more or less imposed upon them.

The Battalion remained tolerably peacefully at Neuf Berquin until 2 p.m. on November 14th, when, under orders received on the previous evening, the

Digitized by Google

Foresters marched out, by way of Estaires, in the general direction of Neuve Chapelle. A halt was, however, made about a mile and a half east of Vieille Chapelle, where the Battalion was accommodated in billets, headquarters being established in the local "pub." The Brigade firing line was drawn some two miles to the S.S.E., and "A" and "D" Companies each put out a platoon on picquet, while "B" and "C" Companies were on inlying picquet. The night passed quietly enough and in a certain degree of comfort, but on the evening of the 15th, "A" and "C" Companies, the Machine-gun Section and 20 men of "D" Company, acting as ammunition carriers under Lieutenant Young, moved out of billets and, joining the 2nd Bn. East Lancashire Regiment, accompanied that unit into the trenches. The rest of the Battalion marched to new billets near Pont du Hem, where it became a reserve to the Brigade, and here trenches were dug as protection against the enemy shelling to which this locality was occasionally subjected.

This first experience of modern war, although short, made a great impression on those that shared it. To begin with, "C" Company's guide lost his way, and for an hour and a half most of the company wandered about in interminable communication trenches until they were retrieved by the Company Commander, who had gone on ahead, and finally reached the front line, where it relieved a company of the Connaught Rangers belonging to the Indian Corps, who had heavy beards and stated that they had been in the line more or less continuously for 36 days.

"In these early days the waste of rifle ammunition was incredible," writes a platoon commander, "and our knowledge of trench warfare practically nil. Ninety-eight per cent. of "A" and "C" Companies had never before been under fire or seen sudden death at close quarters, but even the youngest soldiers acquitted themselves well, and when volunteers were called for to accompany and cover a young sapper officer (now Brevet Lieut.-Colonel Neave, V.C., D.S.O., M.C.) who had been detailed to put out wire in front of the trenches, there was no lack of candidates."

On the 17th the Battalion suffered its first casualty in the war, No. 10393 Private Backhouse, of "C" Company, being killed, while on the following day the casualties rose to 11, two other ranks being killed, while eight were wounded and one man was missing. On the 20th the Battalion was again in the trenches, having relieved the 1st Battalion Worcestershire Regiment, and on this date Lieutenant Dilworth and Sergeant Millar went out to try to find some place whence the Battalion machine guns could enfilade the enemy's lines, but, on coming from behind the cover of a house not far from the German trenches, Lieutenant Dilworth was shot dead by a German soldier at a range of only two yards. Sergeant Millar in turn killed Lieutenant Dilworth's assailant, and made several fruitless attempts to get away his officer's body; in his gallant endeavours Millar was assisted by Privates Siddons; Painter, Cooper, Scott, Bradbury and Chandler, of "C" Company, all of whom were under hot fire from a farm only seventy-five yards distant. The same men volunteered to make another attempt the same night, and when darkness came on Captain Campbell, 4th South Staffordshire Regiment, attached to the Battalion, went out to try to recover Dilworth's body, but was unsuccessful; and on the same

Digitized by Google

night Lieutenant Jackson and a patrol made a special reconnaissance of the enemy's trenches, and received great praise for their work from the G.O.C. 8th Division and the Commander of the IVth Corps, General Sir Henry Rawlinson.

On November 21st and 22nd the enemy began and continued shelling the support trenches, while his snipers were also very active, and on this latter date Captain Campbell, Lance-Corporal Walters and Private Penn went out to reconnoitre a house, the garrison of which had been giving much trouble, firing especially upon the trench ration parties. Captain Campbell and Lance-Corporal Walters were almost at once shot dead, but Private Penn was able to crawl back and give information. Lieutenant Sherbrooke charged out with three sections of the company in the hope of giving some help, but Sherbrooke was almost immediately wounded, and the party had to withdraw. This house —a small brick two-storied one—was afterwards a source of constant trouble. It was only about 120 yards from the Battalion lines, which it rather overlooked, and many casualties were caused by rifle fire from it. Repeated attempts were made to destroy it by gun fire, but it remained standing—a constant annoyance—till captured on March 10th. It was then found that the interior had been built up into a solid mass of sandbags, with most excellent covered fire positions. The Battalion, on relief, now marched back to billets in the Red Barn, Pont du Hem, where some 70 men were admitted to hospital suffering from trench feet, due to cold, wet and exposure.

Writing home on the 25th, Captain Hodgson says:—"We had two officers killed last week. . . I am very sorry Dilworth was one of them, and he was such a good chap. Sherbrooke was also hit. The other day acting as guide was rather exciting, as to reach the rendezvous I had to leave our trenches in daylight, at 200 yards from the Germans, and move across open and flat country. They saw me, but did not hit me; with a few exceptions they are poor shots." On the very next day, however, Hodgson had the bad luck to meet one of the 'exceptions,' and was slightly wounded.

At the end of the month the Battalion was out of the line again and in billets near Estaires; during November, 2 officers and 16 other ranks had been killed, 2 officers and 66 non-commissioned officers and men had been wounded, while one man was missing.

His Majesty the King arrived at Army Headquarters on November 30th on a visit to his Army in the field, and on December 1st the Battalion lined the streets of La Gorgue while His Majesty motored through the town. On its next tour in the trenches—the weather being very wet and the parapets consequently very crumbly—a squadron of the Northamptonshire Yeomanry and a company of the 5th Battalion Black Watch were attached for duty. On the 7th, while near Richebourg, Captain Bankhead-Browne, 4th Battalion North Staffordshire Regiment, arrived with a draft 135 strong for the Battalion. The enemy just now was not especially active, and December 9th was an unusually quiet day, but Second-Lieutenant W. M. Smalley was killed in the communication trench, while crossing an exposed part of the line held by "B" Company, and was buried next day in the dug-outs just to the west of Battalion headquarters. Writing home on December 12th, Captain Hodgson reports:—"The

Digitized by Google

Germans have been making themselves a nuisance in front of us flinging their bombs into our trenches, but they did not seem half so keen when we returned the compliment with our grenades; these things make a beastly noise, but are not so very deadly."

The following appears in the Battalion diary under date of December 13th:—"Orders received that the ordinary relief in the trenches is cancelled, as the 24th Brigade has been detailed to join the 4th Division. Later: The Brigade is to be ready to move early on the morning of the 14th inst., probably to billets in Neuf Berquin to join 4th Division at Nieppe." Accordingly, next day, the Battalion moved a short distance and occupied billets in or near a factory at Estaires, just south of the River Lys, where a large number of boxes and parcels of comforts were received from the city and county of Nottingham, and were distributed to the companies. Here also a draft of 112 non-commissioned officers and men arrived under Second-Lieutenant R. Burton.

The Battalion moved out at 2 p.m. on the 18th, but was overtaken by orders cancelling those previously received, and it marched back to the Red Barn, where the whole of the 24th Infantry Brigade now in this neighbourhood was in reserve to the 23rd Brigade. On the next day Captain Bankhead-Browne was slightly wounded in the leg when moving up to the trenches, while two days later Colonel Marshall was slightly wounded by a sniper in the left breast while going round the front trenches, which were now in an appalling state, worse than they had ever been before, being in many places knee-deep in mud and slush.

Writing a few days after this, Captain Hodgson said:—"The Colonel had a very narrow escape the other day; a bullet came along, cutting every strap on his chest and smashing one button and then grazing him over the heart; he is doing duty. Would you, if you can possibly get an opportunity, mind going to the Cambridge Hospital and making inquiries about a sergeant named Saunders of my company? He was an active and excellent N.C.O., and now he is to lose one foot from frostbite; he is a great loss to me if this is true. Then my chief friend of Bangalore days—Captain Lang—has just gone to St. Thomas's Hospital very bad from exposure and stiff from the hips downwards."

And in such manner were the last days of the first year of the war passed; days of intense physical discomfort in the trenches, under heavy gun and rifle fire, with frequent "warnings" that the enemy was concentrating for a tremendous attack, now on the front of the Indian Corps, now on that of the 8th Division; days of so-called "rest" in uneasy billets, held ready to turn out at any moment to reinforce the front line. The Battalion was due for the trenches on Christmas Day, so that the 24th was kept as the Day of Festival, when the Divisional Commander came round to wish the Battalion a happy Christmas, and, as the Battalion Diary records, "the men started on some of the 1,100 plum-puddings sent them by the county and city of Nottingham."

At this time Lieutenant R. E. C. Weigall came out from home with a draft 165 strong.

On Christmas Day an informal armistice was arranged between the men of the 2nd Battalion East Lancashire Regiment, then occupying the trenches, and

Digitized by Google

the Germans in possession of those over the way, and both sides took the opportunity of collecting their dead, when the Foresters were able to recover the bodies of Lieutenant Dilworth and Lance-Corporal Walters and accord them a soldier's burial. There was now a severe frost; hostilities of the usual kind began again on the 26th, when a deserter came in, and, on being questioned, stated an attack on the 8th Division front was to be made soon after midnight; nothing, however, transpired, except that on the morning of the 27th a thaw set in, accompanied by a violent gale and torrents of rain, whereupon the state of the trenches and dug-outs became indescribable, parapets falling in all round. On the 28th the 1st Battalion Sherwood Foresters arrived in billets as the divisional reserve, and at once set to work training men as bombers, it having been decided that every platoon was to have one non-commissioned officer and five privates specially trained in this novel form of warfare.

On the last day of the year the Battalion was again up in the trenches—"weather damp and cold," so runs the diary; "a quantity of water in the trenches, and a portion of the salient occupied by Nos. 1 and 2 Sections has had to be abandoned." The total casualties during the war up to date totalled 140, 3 officers and 31 other ranks having been killed, 5 officers and 101 non-commissioned officers and men having been wounded. The one man—Private Clarke—shown as "missing" during the month of November had by this time been accounted for, his dead body having been found by some men of the East Lancashire Regiment in front of the trenches.

The following message from the Commander-in-Chief of the Expeditionary Force to his troops was published at this time in a special Order of the Day:—

"*In offering to the Army in France my earnest and most heartfelt good wishes for Christmas and the New Year, I am anxious once more to express the admiration I feel for the valour and endurance they have displayed throughout the campaign, and to assure them that to have commanded such magnificent troops in the field will be the proudest remembrance of my life.*"

At the end of 1914 General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien, Colonel of the Sherwood Foresters, who up to this had held command of the IInd Army Corps, was promoted to command the second of the two Armies into which the British Expeditionary Force was now divided. The Second Army contained the IInd, IIIrd and Vth Corps, while in the First Army, commanded by General Sir Douglas Haig, were the Ist, IVth and the Indian Corps.

"The weather after the New Year was atrocious, heavy rain, frost and gales of wind succeeding each other with hardly a break. The ground was so sodden that all movements of troops became impossible, and the trench work was more difficult than ever. . . A great number of the soldiers contracted frostbite and other ailments. The trenches were very wet, and the discomfort was extreme."*

"The five hundred miles of the allied line were held as to one-tenth by the British, and for the rest by the Belgians and French. It ran from Nieuport generally west of the Yser, along the Ypres Canal, in a salient in front of Ypres, behind Messines to just east of Armentières; then west of Neuve Chapelle to Givenchy, across the La Bassée Canal, east of Vermelles, west of Lens, to just

* Conan Doyle, *British Campaign in France and Flanders*, vol. II, p. 1.

Digitized by Google

east of Arras. From Arras it lay by Albert and Noyons to Soissons, east along the Aisne to just north of Rheims by Vienne to Varennes, then, making a wide curve round Verdun, to the west bank of the Meuse opposite St. Mihiel, and so on to Pont-à-Mousson on the Moselle. Thence it passed east of Lunèville to just east of St. Dié, ten miles inside the frontier. It reached the crest of the Vosges about the Col du Bonhomme, and then ran in German territory to Belfort and the Swiss border. . . The winter's record was a chronicle of small things—a sandhill won east of Nieuport, a trench or two at Ypres, a corner of a brickfield at La Bassée, a few hundred yards near Arras, a farm on the Oise, a mile in northern Champagne, a coppice in the Argonne, a hillock on the Meuse, part of a wood on the Moselle, some of the high glens in the Vosges, and a village or two in Alsace."*

On January 3rd Second-Lieutenant Coxon joined the service companies in charge of a draft of 65 officers and men, 30 of the number being men discharged from hospital, and the Battalion war diaries now describe the days that followed as "quiet," though possibly the compiler of these historic documents passed an existence which was less exciting than that endured by those in the fire-trenches. Captain Hodgson, for example, writing home on the 7th, said:—

"I have been shifted from my old trench to a new one, and we now have about as exciting a time to get in and out as anybody likes. So far luck has been fairly with us, but I own it's a bit of a strain. It's rather like being a card-board rabbit at a penny shooting gallery. The Germans are only 120 yards off, but luckily are only fair shots. I lost my C.S.M. coming back last time, shot in the thigh at this place."

The diary bears evidence daily to the appalling state of the trenches, the incessant rain, and the extreme discomfort endured by all ranks, and it may easily be imagined how keenly sought was the leave which had lately been opened, while it is only from a sentence in a *private* letter that one realizes and appreciates how wonderfully unselfish some men were in giving way to others in the matter of leave. "I might have come home this week," writes "Bobby" Hodgson on January 17th, "but my junior subaltern is going. He isn't 21 and is a child, but has stuck it so well and really wants a change. I shall come in ten days time or thereabouts, with luck." As we shall see later, the writer's "luck" did not very long endure, but we may be sure that his unselfish action has not been forgotten by the boy he sent home on leave in his stead.

The state of the trenches grew daily worse, the communication trenches were flooded and ration parties and reliefs had to move across the open; then, on the 21st, when the Battalion was back in billets at La Gorgue as Corps Reserve, the Foresters experienced a great loss in the departure of Colonel Marshall, who had been ordered to proceed to England to assume command of the 87th Brigade of the 29th Division. On leaving the Battalion he issued the following farewell order:—

"*Colonel Marshall, on giving up command of the Battalion after three years, desires to thank all ranks for their efforts to keep up the high standard both at work and play which has always distinguished the Regiment. The lot of the Battalion in the present war has not so far been an enviable one, but the*

* Buchan, *A History of the Great War*, vol. I, p. 458.

Digitized by Google

Commanding Officer has never admired the Sherwood Foresters more than during the past three months. He is certain that when opportunity offers the Battalion will rival the deeds of the 'Old Stubborns' in the Peninsula."

Major Mortimore, the second-in-command, being at this time on leave, the command of the Battalion devolved temporarily on Captain Webb.

During the month of January two more reinforcements were received, one of 80 men on the 11th and another of 50 other ranks, under Lieutenant Shawcross, on the 22nd, but these separately hardly made up for the heavy wastage of trench warfare, since in one three days' tour in the trenches the casualties totalled 73, and by the end of the month the losses suffered by the Battalion since arrival in France amounted to 66 killed and 242 wounded, all ranks. On the last day of January Captain Douglas was wounded while in the advanced post of No. 3 Section.

During February there was a slight improvement in the general situation, the weather conditions became rather better, and there is almost a congratulatory tone in the Battalion war diary: the appearance of the sun is noted, and we learn that while the trenches are still very muddy and in some places are three feet deep in water, these particular spots have been boarded, and "compared with a month previous they are quite dry and habitable!" The Germans were not so unpleasantly active, and Hodgson reports that "they appear to be short of sandbags, as they are using great bags, blue in colour, and large pieces of sail-cloth on their parapets, to hold the earth." The Foresters were kept busy improving the defences, which had to be of the nature of breastworks, since water was come upon if trenches of a greater depth than 18 inches were dug.

On the 27th the Battalion was ordered to take over a new section from the 2nd Battalion Scottish Rifles; this consisted of breastworks only, as, owing to the presence of water, trenches could not be dug. On this occasion the following flattering orders were published by the Corps, Divisional and Brigade Commanders: From the G.O.C. IVth Corps to the G.O.C. 8th Division:—

"*The Lieutenant-General Commanding the Army Corps wishes you to convey the following message to the General Officer Commanding the 24th Brigade, for communication to the Battalions concerned:—*

"*On handing over 'A' Lines by the Sherwood Foresters and East Lancashire Regiment, the Corps Commander wishes to place on record his high appreciation of the gallant and soldierlike manner in which these Battalions have defended their lines during the past four months. Their casualties have been high—Sherwood Foresters 76 killed and 281 wounded, East Lancashires 59 killed and 224 wounded, but they have stuck to a difficult and dangerous task with a determination worthy of all praise, and have expended an amount of physical labour in the construction of the lines which does them high credit.*"

From the G.O.C. 8th Division to the G.O.C. 24th Infantry Brigade:—

"*The G.O.C. has much pleasure in forwarding the above minute conveying the well-earned appreciation of the G.O.C. IVth Corps of the work done by units in your Brigade. The G.O.C. wishes to add his appreciation of the work done by the 1st Battalion Worcestershire Regiment, who shared with the 1st Battalion Sherwood Foresters the honour of holding 'A' Lines during the first month of occupation.*"

Digitized by Google

From the G.O.C. 24th Brigade to the O.C. 1st Battalion Sherwood Foresters :—

"*The Brigadier is delighted to be able to forward the above. No one appreciates more than he does the excellent work done by the Battalion, especially during the anxious flood times since Christmas. All Battalions have played the game thoroughly and worked splendidly.*

"*The Corps Commander had a long talk with the Brigadier on the 26th on this subject, i.e., floods, work, defence and casualties, and he thoroughly appreciates the extraordinary hard and good work done by regimental officers and men throughout the past trying period.*

"*The Brigadier warmly congratulates all ranks.*"

During February there joined the Battalion two young officers, Second-Lieutenants R. W. Rundle and E. H. Binney, and 159 other ranks, these last being for the most part men from the 3rd Battalion.

The month of March was to introduce the Battalion to more active conditions of warfare, and something may here usefully be said as to the objects sought to be attained by the vigorous offensive which Field-Marshal Sir John French had now for some little time past been arranging to open, employing for the purpose the units of the First Army, supported by troops of the Second Army and the General Reserve. "The object of the main attack was to be the capture of the village of Neuve Chapelle and the enemy's position at that point, and the establishment of our line as far forward as possible to the east of that place. . . The main topographical feature of this part of the theatre is a marked ridge which runs S.W. of Lille to the village of Fournes, whence two spurs run out, one due west to a height known as Haut Pommereau, the other following the line of the main road to Illies. The buildings of the village of Neuve Chapelle run along the Rue du Bois—Fauquisart Road. This area consists of a few big houses, with walls, gardens, orchards, etc., and here, with the aid of numerous machine guns, the enemy had established a strong post which flanked the approaches to the village. The Bois de Biez, which lies roughly south-east of the village of Neuve Chapelle, influenced the course of this operation."*

An historian† has elaborated the above description of the ground to be fought over, and writes :—

"Looking eastward from the British front, Neuve Chapelle showed a long, straggling line of houses among gardens, with a tall white church standing conspicuous over the flats. As studied in one of the photographs which airplanes obtained from above, one main highroad was revealed running N. from La Bassée to Estaires. At Neuve Chapelle a second road left this, and went by Fleurbaix to Armentières, and a connecting road joined the two and formed a diamond-shaped figure, in the west angle of which the village lay. . . At the southern apex of the diamond was a small triangle, bounded by roads and filled with plots and hedgerows. Between the houses and the La Bassée road on the west were meadows and ploughland, where lay the German trenches, our own being about a hundred yards westward, close along the highway. . . . Obviously if the attack could be pushed so far as to carry the second German position"

* Despatch of April 5th, 1915.
† Buchan, *History of the Great War*, vol. I, pp. 542-3.

Digitized by Google

(along the Des Laies River) "the ridge would be won, the La Bassée—Lille line threatened, and, if fortune were kind, Lille itself rendered untenable."

As directed by Sir John French on March 8th, Neuve Chapelle was to be assaulted by the First Army, the IVth Corps operating on the north and the Indian Corps to the south, while supplementary attacks were at the same time to be delivered, by the Ist Corps from Givenchy and by the IIIrd Corps (Second Army) just south of Armentières.

When, early in the month, the Battalion took over "D" Lines, south of La Flinque, the trenches were in a terrible state owing to the heavy rain which had fallen, and casualties at once recommenced, Lieutenant E. M. Williamson being killed early on the morning of the 1st while crossing a road visiting a detached platoon. Of him Hodgson wrote on the 4th :—

"I am most awfully sorry that poor young Williamson of ours has been killed. He was a really good boy and plucky. He wasn't in my company, but I saw a good deal of him. He gave me a black eye last week, boxing, and I shall miss him as a sparring companion. I wish we could get more like him."

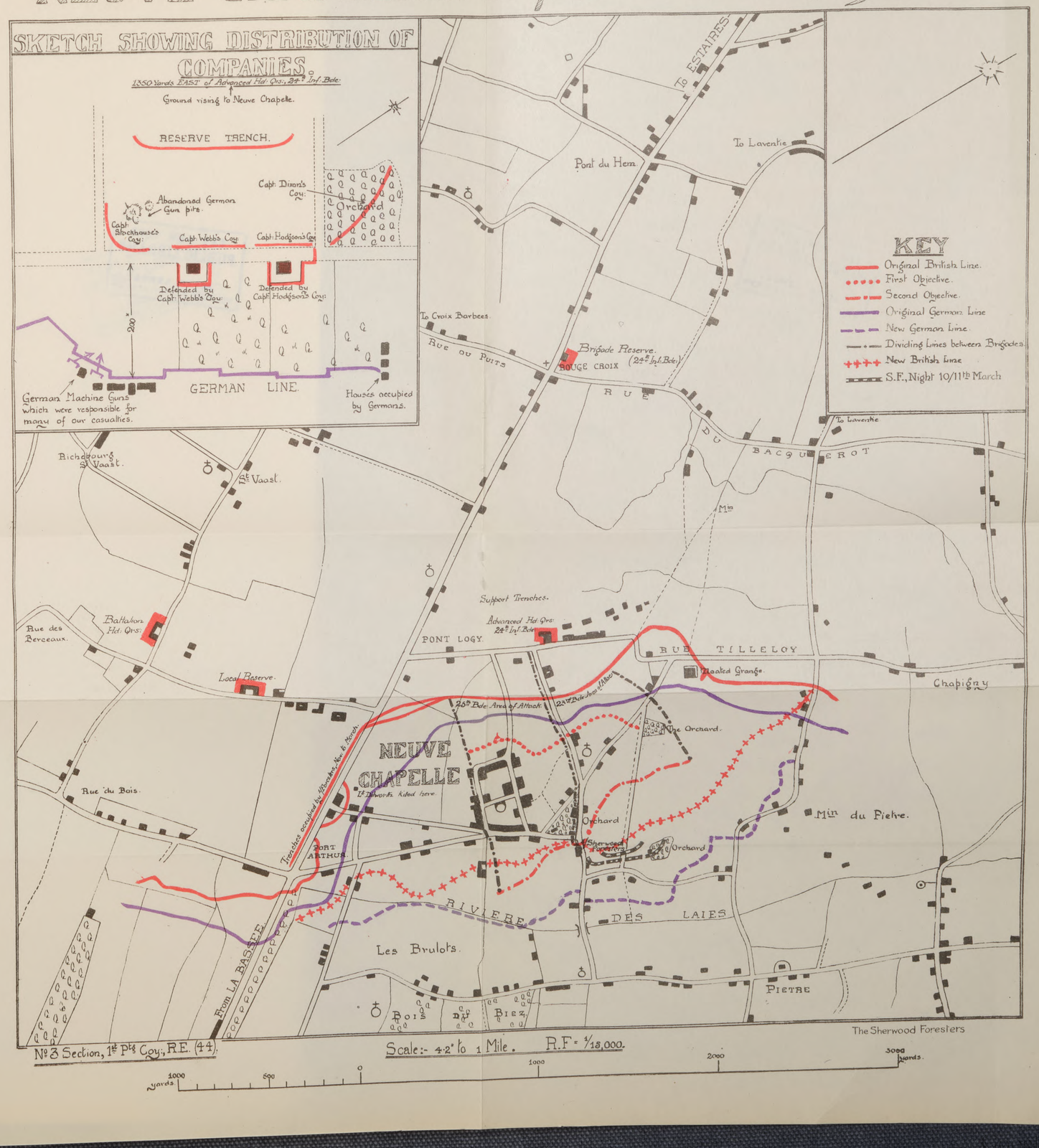
Williamson was hit through a screen which had been put up to hide an unprotected portion of the line, and the enemy often fired through it "on chance."

The Battle of Neuve Chapelle opened at 7.30 a.m. on March 10th with a powerful artillery bombardment of the enemy's position at Neuve Chapelle, and at 8.5 a.m. the 23rd (left) and the 25th (right) Brigades of the 8th Division assaulted the German trenches on the north-west of the village, the 24th Brigade being held in reserve. The 25th Brigade carried the enemy's lines of entrenchment and, pushing on eastward, succeeded in getting a footing in the village, but the 23rd Brigade was not so successful owing to the wire in its front not having been sufficiently cut, and it was held up, suffering heavy losses, until the further advance of the 25th Brigade drove the enemy from the front of the 23rd. By 11 a.m. the village of Neuve Chapelle and the roads leading north and south-east from it were in our hands. There was now, however, some delay before any further advance could be made, for the units engaged were somewhat broken up from the character of the fighting and the nature of the advance.

At 11.45 the 24th Brigade moved forward, first to Pont Logy and then to support trenches 600 yards north of Pont Logy on the east of Rue de Tilleloy. The Foresters were then sent to the cross-roads north of Neuve Chapelle, and were directed on Piètre; they deployed for attack, but, having advanced some 1,000 yards north-east of Neuve Chapelle, were held up by machine-gun fire from the houses and trenches at the road junction 600 yards north-west of Piètre; the Battalion now entrenched so as to make good the ground gained, and was supported by the 2nd East Lancashires in rear. The line selected, and which was held all that night and all through the 11th, included some ruined cottages and extended from an orchard on the left to some cross-roads on the right, the enemy occupying ground from 100—200 yards in front, covering Piètre. During the night the Germans received considerable reinforcements, but when the morning of March 11th broke the Battalion was fairly well entrenched, and it was fortunate that it was so, for the enemy early began shelling, and all through the day the Foresters' trenches were subjected to a

Digitized by Google

NEUVE CHAPELLE. 10TH/11TH MARCH, 1915.



THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
ASTOR, LENOX
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS

Digitized by Google

heavy fire and the casualties began to mount up. One of the Commanding Officer's orderlies, Private Wilkinson, trying to get back with a message to the Brigade, was shot down and lay in the open between the front and support trenches. Two sergeants of the Battalion—Sergeant Adkin being one—at once leapt from cover and ran to his help; they had just lifted him when they all came under cross-fire from enemy machine guns which riddled all three with bullets.

About 2 p.m. the advance was renewed in co-operation with the Royal Scots Fusiliers on the left, when "C" Company managed to advance through the orchard on the left and established themselves in some ruined houses, Lieutenant Weigall being killed in this advance; while about 4 in the afternoon "D" Company charged the enemy's breastworks, but were met by overpowering machine-gun fire. By this time the losses in all ranks, and especially in officers, had been mounting up: Captain M. K. Hodgson had been mortally wounded during the morning, Captain Webb was hit at mid-day, Captain W. T. Stackhouse and Second-Lieutenant W. H. Coxon were killed, Major Mortimore, Second-Lieutenants Burton, Waters and Webster had later been wounded; and during the remainder of the night the Battalion—what was left of it—held a line of trenches connecting two very dilapidated farmhouses, the German breastworks being only from 100—200 yards distant.

The morning of March 12th was very misty, and it was difficult to see beyond a short distance from the British trenches, when about 5 a.m. the enemy suddenly opened a very heavy gun-fire, shelling the Battalion headquarters in one of the above-mentioned farms, where Major Morley, now in command, had gathered his company commanders preparatory to a reconnaissance, and the Germans then advanced in great strength to the attack of four points on the Battalion front. The force attacking on the extreme left of the position was mistaken in the mist for a strong listening patrol which had been sent out up the road, and the return of which was then expected. A trench in the orchard on this flank was consequently successfully rushed, and the attackers then made for the left of the two farms, while another party attacked the buildings from the east. The platoon holding the northern face was completely surrounded, and the Germans, having bombed the building, stormed in, when severe hand-to-hand fighting took place in the farm rooms and courtyard, the survivors of the garrison, eight in number, finally cutting their way out.

The main attack was delivered by a dense mass of Germans against the Battalion right, and the farm and trenches to the right were rushed, a machine gun in the farm doing great execution but failing seriously to check the attack, which swept over the right wing of the Foresters. A fighting mass of British and Germans, intermingled, at length reached the support trenches, and here the advance was checked by musketry fire, by the efforts of company-bomber Private Rivers, and by counter-attacks from the left and left-centre.

The services of Private Rivers, who was killed in this action, were recognized by the award of a posthumous Victoria Cross, notified as under in the supplement to the *London Gazette* of April 28th, 1915.

"*No. 6016 Private Jacob Rivers, late 1st Battalion The Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Regiment.*

Digitized by Google

"*For most conspicuous bravery at Neuve Chapelle on March 12th, 1915, when he, on his own initiative, crept to within a few yards of a very large number of the enemy who were massed on the flank of an advanced company of his battalion and hurled bombs on them. His action caused the enemy to retire and so relieved the situation.*

"*Private Rivers performed a second act of great bravery on the same day, similar to the first-mentioned, again causing the enemy to retire. He was killed on this occasion.*"

Just over eight years later—on March 24th, 1923—the Freedom of the Town of Derby was conferred upon the mother of the dead hero, the same honour being at the same time conferred upon Lord Derby and Field-Marshal Earl Haig.

The enemy now began to mass opposite the gaps between the Battalion right and the left of the 25th Brigade—some 200 to 300 yards.

Gradually British rifle-fire began to get the upper hand, and by 6.30 a.m. the German advance was stopped, and now a counter-attack was organized and executed by a company of the Worcesters and a company and a half of the Battalion, and the Germans were driven back to their starting point, their retreat becoming in its later stages more of the nature of a disordered flight. The original trenches were recaptured and reoccupied by about 7.30 a.m.

During the latter part of this fighting Captain H. B. Dixon, Second-Lieutenants G. M. Shacklock and H. C. S. Walker were killed, and Lieutenant and Adjutant R. H. Stranger, Lieutenant J. E. A. O'Dwyer and Second-Lieutenant E. H. Binney were wounded; of the other ranks 90 were killed, 265 were wounded, and 87 were missing—the total casualties in this fighting representing more than 50 per cent. of the Battalion strength. Of 18 officers of the Battalion who went into action at Neuve Chapelle 16 were hit—9 being killed and 7 wounded. On the other hand the enemy loss far exceeded ours; between the two lines over 400 dead Germans were counted, and some 200 more were lying between the opposing trenches. In addition, the Foresters took between 40 and 50 prisoners, most of them wounded.

At 9 p.m. the Battalion was withdrawn to the support trench and a new defensive line was taken up, and then, five hours later, an order was received for a further retirement to reserve trenches on the Rue de Tilleloy at Sign Post Corner.

During the fighting Private Hardy behaved with conspicuous gallantry, volunteering to bring up ammunition to the men in the front line trenches, who were running short. He accomplished his self-imposed task though exposed to very heavy fire from the enemy, and in spite of the fact that he was wounded on the return journey. In the November following Private Hardy was awarded the French Croix de Guerre.

"Of the six brigades of the IVth Corps, all suffered about equally, except the 22nd, which was not so hard hit as the others. The remaining brigades lost over 25 per cent. of their numbers, but nothing of their efficiency and zeal, as they were very soon to show in the later engagements. When one remembers that Julius Cæsar describes an action as a severe one on the ground that every

Digitized by Google

tenth man was wounded, it may be conjectured that he would have welcomed a legion of Scottish Rifles or Sherwood Foresters."*

Writing to Major Mortimore, in hospital, the Brigadier said:—"*Do* let me know how you are; your Battalion did awfully well in that fight"; while General Sir Douglas Haig, in a letter to Lady Haig, wrote: "I am so sorry to hear about Major Mortimore. He and his Battalion did splendidly at Neuve Chapelle."

During the remainder of the month the conditions of warfare in this section returned to something like the normal—tours in the trenches varied by occasional periods of welcome rest in billets in rear; on the 21st General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien paid a visit to the 1st Battalion of his Regiment, thanking them for the glorious part they had played at Neuve Chapelle; during the month 4 officers—Captain Young, Lieutenants Wylie, Stackhouse and Blaxland—and 309 non-commissioned officers and men joined; and then, on the 24th, the Battalion marched by way of Pont Croix, La Gorgue and Pont de la Lys to billets in Neuf Berquin, being met at Pont de la Lys by the band of the 6th Battalion of the Regiment, which struck up "The Young May Moon" with electrical effect, and played the 1st Battalion into billets, while the road through Neuf Berquin was lined by men of the Sherwood Foresters Brigade who gave the 1st Battalion a very hearty welcome.

April may be described as a quiet month; remarks of an unusually flattering character are made in the Diary about the general state of the new trenches taken over in this sector; the casualties were low and were very much more than made good by the reinforcement of 224 other ranks which joined during the month; this was an especially useful reinforcement, as more than 100 were old soldiers who had been out before; Lieutenants Ebsworth and Willison, Second-Lieutenants E. F. Millar and R. P. Stoneham came out from home, and Captain Collins, R.A.M.C., replaced Captain Howell in medical charge of the Battalion.

In the operations known at the time as the Second Battle of Ypres, and which endured for a month—from April 22nd to May 24th—the 24th Brigade in general and the Foresters in particular had no share; but in the early part of May the Battalion was again called upon to play its part in some especially fierce and costly fighting. In his despatch of June 15th, Sir John French wrote that "in pursuance of a promise which I made to the French Commander-in-Chief to support an attack which his troops were making on May 9th between the right of my line and Arras, I directed Sir Douglas Haig to carry out on that date an attack on the German trenches in the neighbourhood of Rougebanc (north-west of Fromelles) by the IVth Corps, and between Neuve Chapelle and Givenchy by the Ist and Indian Corps."

The attack in the north upon Rouges Bancs was entrusted to the 8th Division, which was ordered to move forward at 5.30 a.m. on May 9th, at the close of a sudden and severe bombardment of the enemy lines, timed to commence at 5; the 25th Brigade was to assault, supported by the 24th, with the 23rd in reserve. The 24th Brigade was now commanded by Brigadier-General R. S. Oxley, C.B.

The Battalion moved out of its billets near Sailly on the night of the 8th, and arrived at the assembly trenches, some 500 yards south of Rue Petillon, without

* Conan Doyle, *The British Campaign in France and Flanders*, vol. II, pp. 27-28.

Digitized by Google

mishap just after midnight. The 25th Brigade had suffered very heavy losses in attacking the German trenches and could make no real progress, and at 5.55 a.m. on the 9th an advance was made by the 24th Infantry Brigade, the 2nd East Lancashires leading, supported by "B" and "D" Companies of the Sherwood Foresters on the left and right respectively. The attack of the East Lancashires was almost at once checked by heavy machine-gun fire, and by the difficulty experienced in passing their men out of the assembly trenches, and consequently it was not until 6.10 that the leading platoons of the Battalion started to climb over the parapet of the fire-trench close on the heels of the East Lancashire men. It was at once noticeable that our artillery preparation had been wholly insufficient, for the enemy's parapets were undamaged, the trenches were held in strength, while between Points 373 and 375 there were eight machine guns, some in fixed positions and others firing without tripods from the top of the breastwork. It being apparent that the leading battalion was making no headway, "B" and "D" Companies of the Sherwood Foresters changed direction half-right and advanced against Point 373, but still found themselves under machine-gun fire, while this part of the enemy line seemed to be even more strongly held than that first assailed, but none the less the leading platoon of "B" Company managed to get within 40 yards of the German wire; this, however, had been cut in one place only by the British gun-fire, where there was a gap some four yards wide, but it was noticed that in several places the *chevaux de frise* were sunk and so had escaped injury. At this time an order, the origin of which was obscure, was passed along—"From G.O.C.: Stop advance," and it being now noticed that the Berkshire and East Lancashire battalions were withdrawing to the line of trenches immediately in front of the breastwork, Major Morley ordered "B" and "D" Companies to fall back behind the breastwork and reorganize.

The respite was, however, a very brief one, for at 7.35 a.m. the East Lancashires again essayed an advance, supported by "A" and "C" Companies of the Battalion, who were now themselves supported by "B" and "D" Companies; but the attempt was checked by renewed outbursts of shell and machine-gun fire, and the deployed companies lay down wherever the impetus of the advance had carried them, and many officers and men remained out in the open.

At 1.15 p.m. the enemy brought an enfilade shell fire on the trenches of the Battalion from the left, and Major Morley had just ordered "A" and "C" Companies to fall back to the breastwork, when he was wounded by shrapnel and handed over command to Captain Wayte.

There was now something of a lull in the enemy gun-fire, but desultory shelling went on until 7.30 p.m., when the Germans opened with high explosive, causing many casualties among officers and men of the Battalion and doing considerable damage to the breastworks behind which was now the greater part of what remained of the Foresters. Lieutenant and Acting-Adjutant Millar at this time set a fine example of coolness and gallantry, and helped to beat back a threatened attack.

Soon after 10 p.m. the Battalion was relieved by the Worcestershire

Digitized by Google

Regiment and ordered back to Rouge de Bout, where it arrived about 1 a.m. on May 10th and went into bivouac.

During these operations Corporal James Upton, of the Battalion, won the Victoria Cross, his deed of valour being recorded as follows in the *London Gazette* of June 29th, 1915 :—

"*For most conspicuous bravery near Rouges Bancs on May 9th,* 1915.

"*During the whole of this day Corporal Upton displayed the greatest courage in rescuing the wounded whilst exposed to very heavy rifle and artillery fire, going close to the enemy's parapets regardless of his own personal safety. One wounded man was killed by a shell whilst this non-commissioned officer was carrying him.*

"*When Corporal Upton was not actually carrying in the wounded he was engaged in bandaging and dressing serious cases in front of our parapet, exposed to the enemy's fire.*

In this fighting, the prelude to the Battle of Richebourg—Festubert, the 8th Division casualties totalled 4,500; the Sherwood Foresters had 3 officers—Second-Lieutenants D. C. J. Copland, G. F. G. Dick, and R. P. Stoneham—and 52 other ranks killed; 12 officers and 245 non-commissioned officers and men were wounded, the officers being Major L. St. H. Morley, Captain R. B. Young, Lieutenants T. S. Bowman (Royal Sussex, attached), C. S. C. Kennedy, P. H. Munro-Faure and J. P. Wylie, Second-Lieutenants W. A. Ebsworth, E. F. Millar, J. H. Stackhouse, H. Stott, C. T. Watson and W. G. West; while Second-Lieutenant R. W. Rundle and 46 other ranks were missing—total casualties, all ranks, being 359.

"When it is remembered," says a writer, "that these were the same battalions which had lost so heavily at Neuve Chapelle just two months before, one can but marvel at the iron nerve which enabled them once again to endure so searching a test."

The rest of the month passed fairly quietly; many officers joined or rejoined —Captain R. L. Sherbrooke, Lieutenant E. E. S. Taylor, Second-Lieutenants B. G. Allen, N. S. Temple, C. Neville, R. W. Shannon, N. P. Birley, N. G. Wragg, J. F. Menzies, G. L. Tutin, and C. H. G. Millis—with 110 other ranks; and the last week of the month was passed in divisional and brigade reserve at Estaires; while from the evening of May 30th the 8th Division was taken out of the IVth and joined the Indian Corps, commanded by Lieutenant-General Sir James Willcocks, the 51st Highland Division taking its place in the IVth Corps. This arrangement was, however, only a temporary one, for on June 26th the 51st Division again joined General Willcocks' force, the 8th Division then going to the IIIrd Corps, commanded by Lieutenant-General Sir W. Pulteney.

For some considerable time now, as time was measured at the front, the 1st Sherwood Foresters were not engaged in any very stirring events, so opportunity may here usefully be taken to describe the composition of the British battle-line in France during the summer of 1915.

On the extreme left or north of the Imperial battle-line, lying to the north of Hooge, was the VIth Corps (Keir); upon its right, and defending Hooge and its neighbourhood, was Allenby's Vth Corps; while south of Hooge came the IInd Corps (Fergusson) and the IIIrd (Pulteney), the 8th Division being on

Digitized by Google

the extreme right. These four corps formed the Second Army, under General Plumer, and contained 13 divisions, or roughly 260,000 men. To the right or south of these was the First Army, under General Sir Douglas Haig—the Indian Corps about Festubert, and then in order the Ist and IVth Corps—a total of nine divisions, or approximately 180,000 men, the two armies thus extending from north of Ypres to north of Arras, and mustering together some 440,000 men.

In June and July the company commanders in the Battalion appear to have been Captains Sherbrooke and Needham, Lieutenants Wyncoll and Chambers.

Both June and July passed uneventfully, though there were constant reports that the Germans had been heard mining under the trenches occupied by the Battalion, and these were, consequently, later vacated and others taken over some fifty yards to the rear. On July 8th the Divisional Commander presented Corporal Upton with the ribbon of the Victoria Cross, and on the 14th that non-commissioned officer left for England to receive his decoration from His Majesty the King.

It was about this time that some of the new Service Battalions began to arrive in France, and one of them—a battalion of Rifles—was attached for instruction to the Foresters. An officer going round his company posts during the night found Private Smallwood, a boy of 17 or 18 years, carefully instructing his rifleman father in the art of filling sandbags and revetting parapets!

About the middle of August the 24th Brigade occupied the Croix Maréchal area, and the Battalion now found itself in billets in and around Fleurbaix, the front line held in connection with which was in the Bois Grenier section; at this time there was considerable aerial activity on both sides, but on the whole things were tolerably quiet, though from various signs and portents it was plainly to be seen that such a condition was not likely very much longer to endure. On September 4th two young officers—Second-Lieutenants Ambler and Moore—joined on appointment from the Artists' Rifles, and on the following day we read in the Battalion diary that "companies are busy preparing for possible offensive operations." On September 21st an intense bombardment of the enemy trenches was initiated and kept up for several days in succession; on the evening of the 24th the Battalion came under command of Lieutenant-Colonel Lambert, East Lancashire Regiment, forming a semi-independent force to be known as "Lambert's Detachment," and on the 25th the companies of the Battalion moved forward—"A" and "B" occupying the front line trenches from the west wall of the Convent to Boutillerie Road, "C" and "D" in the reserve trench some 300 yards in rear.

The operations which now commenced, and which are known as the Battle of Loos, were undertaken in consequence of a decision for joint action come to between the British and French Commanders-in-Chief;* and so far as the British share in these was concerned, it consisted of a main attack and several subsidiary or holding attacks. The main assault upon the German positions was delivered by the Ist and IVth Corps between the La Bassée Canal on the north and a point of the enemy's line opposite the village of Grenay on the south; secondary or subsidiary attacks, designed with the object of distracting

* *Vide* Sir John French's Despatch of October 15th, 1915.

Digitized by Google

the enemy's attention and holding his troops to their ground, were made (a) by the Vth Corps on Bellewaarde Farm, east of Ypres, and (b) by the IIIrd and Indian Corps north of the La Bassée Canal and along the whole front of the Second Army. Of these last two corps the Indians attacked the Moulin de Pièttre, while the IIIrd was directed against the trenches at Le Bridoux, the 8th Division attacking in the region of Bois Grenier. The orders issued directed that the 8th Division was to make an attack, the 25th Brigade in front line, the 24th in support and the 23rd in reserve, "Lambert's Detachment" being on the right of the assaulting brigade and its task being to keep the enemy in front so fully occupied that no enfilade fire could be brought to bear on the 25th Brigade. This was done by the development of somewhat exaggerated rifle and machine-gun fire, and by various feints similating attack. The German front trench was carried by the 25th Brigade, and some 120 men of the Bavarian Reserve Division fell into the hands of the stormers. Part of the second line was also captured and the positions gained were held for the greater part of the day, and it was not until well on into the afternoon that the arrival of substantial German reinforcements and the increasing pressure of the enemy counter-attacks drove back the brigade to its original line; but by this time the object sought had been fully achieved.

The Field-Marshal wrote in his despatch already quoted:—"These attacks started at daybreak and were at first successful all along the line. Later in the day the enemy brought up strong reserves, and after hard fighting and variable fortunes the troops engaged in this part of the line reoccupied their original trenches at nightfall. They succeeded admirably, however, in fulfilling the rôle allotted to them, and in holding large numbers of the enemy away from the main attack."

During these operations the 8th Division was commanded by Major-General H. Hudson, C.B., C.I.E., who had recently taken the place of General Davies.

The part this day played by the Battalion is now given in more detail.

The orders received by the Officer Commanding The Sherwood Foresters directed that in the event of the retirement of the enemy in front, one company of the Battalion should occupy the salient on the right of Boutillerie Road and endeavour to consolidate on the chord line, joining up at the same time with "A" Company of the East Lancashire Regiment on the left, which was similarly operating on the left of Boutillerie Road. "D" Company, under command of Captain Sherbrooke, was detailed for this duty, and that officer moved his headquarters up to the left of the Battalion line. In the event of there being no rifle or other fire from the enemy salient, it was desirable to ascertain by the agency of a patrol to what extent the German front line was held, and accordingly Lieutenant Spinney, with 21 bombers, moved to a position of readiness on the left. The final bombardment of the German position was timed to commence at 4.25 a.m. on the 25th, and precisely at 4.24 a.m., when only one of the British guns had prematurely opened, an intensely heavy rifle and machine-gun fire broke out from the German salient and along the whole line for 300 yards to the west of it, being maintained for some 35 minutes. Our front trench companies endeavoured to use smoke candles with which they had been provided, but the wind was unfavourable and the smoke was blown back in our

Digitized by Google

men's faces, causing inconvenience and nausea, and preventing them from using their rifles effectively.

This was the Battalion's first experience of really heavy concentrated rifle and machine-gun fire from an enemy in strongly-entrenched positions, *plus* a strong artillery barrage, and it was thanks to the tremendous efforts that the companies had made to strengthen and deepen their trenches that the casualties were comparatively trifling.

At 5.55 a.m., there being no doubt as to the presence of the enemy in force, Captain Sherbrooke decided against sending forward any patrol.

For six hours—from 6 a.m. until midday—the Germans shelled the Foresters' positions incessantly with high explosive, distributing their fire tolerably impartially over the three lines of trenches, but the parapets being thick and the dug-outs affording good cover, there were happily no more than eight casualties.

The enemy fire, which had slackened at noon, broke out with renewed vigour at 4.50 p.m., the Germans shelling support and front line trenches; the night of the 25th—26th passed, however, tolerably quietly; on Sunday, the 26th, there were rapid bursts of fire carried out from our trenches, and then in the evening the Battalion was relieved and returned to billets in the neighbourhood of Smith's Villa.

The casualties sustained during the month of September amounted to 84 non-commissioned officers and men killed, and 73 wounded or missing.

On October 2nd Major Wayte was admitted to hospital suffering from trench fever, and Captain Sherbrooke assumed command of the Battalion in his place.

On October 20th the 24th Brigade was sent to the 23rd Division, which had just arrived from England under the command of General Babington, the 70th Brigade of the 23rd Division going to the 8th Division. With a view to carrying this scheme of amalgamation one step further, the battalions of the 24th Brigade were split up between the brigades of the 23rd Division, and the 1st Sherwood Foresters were attached for instructional purposes to the 68th Brigade, under command of General Serocold. For four days two companies of the Battalion were attached to the 10th Northumberland Fusiliers and two companies of the latter unit were attached to the 1st Sherwood Foresters, leaving behind them a most excellent impression.

About this time the 1/5th Black Watch, which for some weeks had been attached to the 24th Brigade, was withdrawn for conversion into a divisional pioneer battalion, when the following letter was received by Captain Sherbrooke from the Colonel of the Black Watch :—

"On behalf of myself and all officers and other ranks of the battalion under my command, I wish to convey to you and all officers and other ranks of the 1st Battalion The Sherwood Foresters our most heartfelt gratitude for all the many courtesies and kindnesses shown to us while we have been serving together in the 24th Infantry Brigade, and the forbearance extended to us on so many occasions.

"The helpful advice which has so often been readily afforded us will never be forgotten, and the lively friendship and comradeship which has sprung up amongst us all may, I trust, never die down."

Digitized by Google

From the friendship thus established the Battalion acquired the title, temporarily, of the "Notts and Jocks."

During the remainder of the year 1915 the 1st Battalion Sherwood Foresters was not engaged in any operations of outstanding importance—only the trench warfare continued unceasingly and the toll of killed and wounded was daily taken. On November 5th the battalion occupying the trenches on the left was relieved by the 11th (Service) Battalion of the Regiment, this being the first occasion during the war when two battalions of the Sherwood Foresters served alongside one another in the trenches. On the 8th the Battalion left the 68th Brigade, congratulated on their work and conduct while attached thereto by Brigadier-General Serocold, and rejoined the 24th.

The weather grew wintry and changeable, one day fine and frosty, the next rainy, turning the trenches into rivers and the fields into seas of mud and water. Christmas Eve was passed in the trenches, and on the afternoon of this day the enemy fired on the salient held by the Foresters with heavy trench mortars; a bomb from one of these falling in a portion of the trench held by some men of "A" Company, Sergeant Hinett displayed superb courage and presence of mind, picking it up and throwing it back over the parapet, where it burst. His action undoubtedly saved the lives of the four men in the trench with him, as they were in a dead-end, there was no cover or way of escape, and all must have been killed or very severely wounded had the bomb exploded where it first fell.

Christmas Day was celebrated by the Battalion on December 27th. His Majesty the King did not forget his soldiers fighting on so many fronts, and the following message was promulgated among all ranks:—

"*Another Christmas finds all the resources of the Empire still engaged in war, and I desire to convey on my own behalf, and on behalf of the Queen, a heartfelt Christmas greeting and Our good wishes for the New Year to all who, on Sea and Land, are upholding the honour of the British name. In the officers and men of My Navy, on whom the security of the Empire depends, I repose, in common with all my subjects, a trust that is absolute. On the officers and men of My Armies, whether now in France, in the East, or in other fields, I rely with an equal faith, confident that their devotion, their valour and their self-sacrifice will, under God's guidance, lead to Victory and an honourable Peace. There are many of their comrades now, alas, in hospital, and to these brave fellows, also, I desire, with the Queen, to express Our deep gratitude and Our earnest prayers for their recovery.*

"*Officers and men of the Navy and Army, another year is drawing to a close, as it began, in toil, bloodshed and suffering; but I rejoice to know that the goal to which you are striving draws nearer into sight.*

"*May God bless you and all your undertakings.*

(Sd.) "*GEORGE R.I.*"

Just a week before Christmas a change had been effected in the command of the British Expeditionary Force, which on December 19th Field-Marshal Sir John French resigned into the able hands of General Sir Douglas Haig, proceeding to England to assume charge of the Home Forces. On leaving France the Field-Marshal issued the following valedictory order:—

"*In relinquishing the command of the British Army in France, I wish to*

Digitized by Google

express to the officers, non-commissioned officers and men with whom I have been so closely associated during the last sixteen months, my heartfelt sorrow in parting with them before the campaign, in which we have been so long engaged together, has been brought to a victorious conclusion. I have, however, the firmest conviction that such a glorious ending to their splendid and heroic efforts is not far distant, and I shall watch their progress towards this final goal with intense interest, but in the most confident hope.

"The success so far attained has been due to the indomitable spirit, dogged tenacity which knows no defeat, and the heroic courage so abundantly displayed by the rank and file of the splendid Army which it will ever remain the pride and glory of my life to have commanded during over sixteen months of incessant fighting.

"Regulars and Territorials, Old Army and New, have ever shown these magnificent qualities in equal degree. From my heart I thank them all.

"At this sad moment of parting, my heart goes out to those who have received life-long injury from wounds, and I think with sorrow of that great and glorious host of my beloved comrades who have made the greatest sacrifice of all by laying down their lives for their country.

"In saying goodbye to the British Army in France, I ask them once again to accept this expression of my deepest gratitude and heartfelt devotion towards them, and my earnest good wishes for the glorious future which I feel to be assured."

At the end of this year the following officers were serving with the 1st Battalion of our Regiment:—

Battalion Staff.—Major R. L. Sherbrooke; Captain G. E. Venner, 3rd Battalion (second-in-command); Lieutenant C. H. G. Millis, 4th Battalion (adjutant); Lieutenant F. A. W. Coman (quartermaster); Lieutenant J. F. Menzies, 3rd Battalion (machine-gun officer); Lieutenant J. B. Mudge, 3rd Battalion (transport officer); Lieutenant N. P. Birley, 2nd South Staffs. (bombing officer).

"A" Company.—Captain E. E. S. Taylor; Lieutenant W. Perkins, 4th Battalion; Second-Lieutenant A. C. Willison; Second-Lieutenant R. F. Moore (temporary commission), Artists' Rifles; Second-Lieutenant R. M. Thrupp (temporary commission), Artists' Rifles; Second-Lieutenant C. F. Wolley-Dod.

"B" Company.—Captain C. R. Chambers; Second-Lieutenant W. W. G. Stables (temporary commission), Artists' Rifles; Second-Lieutenant P. E. Burrows, 3rd Battalion; Second-Lieutenant C. B. Brindley, 4th Battalion; Second-Lieutenant J. E. M. Walker, 11th Battalion; Second-Lieutenant F. J. M. Shaw.

"C" Company.—Lieutenant C. Neville, 3rd Battalion; Second-Lieutenant F. G. Stribling (temporary commission), Artists' Rifles; Second-Lieutenant P. Fletcher (temporary commission), Artists' Rifles; Second-Lieutenant R. O. Brown, 13th Battalion; Second-Lieutenant P. N. Cooper, 13th Battalion.

"D" Company.—Captain J. R. Webster (temporary commission); Lieutenant K. N. Bion; Lieutenant B. C. Smith, 3rd Battalion; Second-Lieutenant C. Ambler (temporary commission), Artists' Rifles; Lieutenant B. H. Scott, 4th Battalion; Second-Lieutenant W. M. Robinson.

In medical charge of the Battalion was Captain M. Murphy, R.A.M.C.

Digitized by Google

Map 4

CHAPTER III.

1916.

THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME.

Battle Honour: "*Albert.*"

THE first two or three months of 1916 passed for our 1st Battalion without any incident of special importance; it remained on for several more or less dreary weeks in much the same sector, cheered by the appearance of the names of officers and men in despatches, and the resultant issues of the awards made to them. In January Lieutenant J. M. Thrupp was wounded, and in February Lieutenant J. P. Tucker and Second-Lieutenant J. W. Davidson joined the Battalion, and in the last week of this month the Battalion moved to Les Ciseaux, and found itself not only in Corps Reserve but, for the first time for fifteen months, out of the shell area.

On the last day of February the Battalion marched to Thiennes and there entrained for Bruay, the Division having now been transferred from the IIIrd Corps (General Pulteney) to the XIVth Corps, commanded by General (later Field-Marshal) Sir Henry Wilson.

On March 5th there was a further change, when the 1st Battalion Sherwood Foresters moved to Grand Servin and came for the first time in its long and varied history under a French commander, being here attached to the 17th Division of the French Army, and being almost at once marched via Ablain St. Nazaire to the trenches at Notre Dame de Lorette in the Secteur Français, there relieving the 290th Regiment of the Line, being met, so reads the Battalion Diary, "with the greatest possible courtesy and consideration. Although by no means sorry to be relieved in an unpleasant part of the line, both officers and men were willing to give us every possible assistance." A company officer elaborates this account as follows:—"On arrival in the French sector we were met by guides and led with much pride to our reserve trenches on the famous battlefield of 1915; my company—'A'—was to be on the other side of Notre Dame de Lorette to the rest of the Battalion. We were guided in by night, and what with the dead lying about, the snow, and the broken barbed wire, we had a pretty nasty muddling track and arrived in no little mess. My guide loudly and proudly shouted 'Attention aux cadavres!' at intervals *after* one had trodden on a ten-months dead German, while 'Attention aux files' indicated that you had either just fallen on your face over a trip wire or that your clothes were being torn off your back by barbed wire. However, we arrived in the end, and, before one could say 'Knife,' the French regiment had gone. When we moved up to the front line just east of Souchez we found things anything but pleasant. It was a spur of the Vimy Ridge, and the French attack of 1915 had

Digitized by Google

failed to carry it and eventually they had been driven off the top. When we took over, the Germans were in the old French trenches at the top and we were down the slope, so that the whole of our front positions could be looked into by the enemy on the ridge. The left platoon had a shallow trench, but the others had only muddy holes; no platoon was connected with any other, while there was no wire in front except a line which ran almost at right angles to us. The other three companies of the Battalion were in an old quarry further down the slope, into the side of which the French had made a great cave."

There was here tolerably persistent shelling by the German guns, but the enemy infantry observed a sort of unofficial armistice, never firing a shot by day or night, and leaving all active operations to their trench mortars and gunners.

"The enemy in our front," writes the company officer already quoted, "proved to be the Saxons, and one called out and asked if we were the Notts and Derbys, and told us that just before the war he had worked in a jeweller's shop in Nottingham. We held very little conversation with the enemy, who were prepared to be friendly and did not want to be shot any more than we did, and practically no rifle or machine-gun fire took place—apart from other things, our weapons were so covered with mud they were hardly usable. The enemy in front were very obliging, and would tell us, 'At 10 our guns shoot at you, look out!' and, sure enough, we would be shelled at that hour. However, one day a trench mortar, loud and large, opened on us, and although, on account of the mud, it did little damage, yet it alarmed some of us considerably. When it ceased the enemy were at once upbraided for failing to notify us of the 'Hate,' and they were full of the most profuse apologies, and explained that the pioneers worked the trench mortars and had failed to let their own infantry know."

The Souchez valley, which separated the forward trenches on the Vimy Ridge from Ablain St. Nazaire, was a morass of flooded shell holes and liquid mud, and could only be traversed by means of a raised plank road several hundred yards long. Needless to say, this track throughout its length was the object of constant attention from the German artillery, and anyone unfortunate enough to be caught in the middle had to decide between the Boche shrapnel and a mud bath, if not a watery grave.

The second day that the Battalion was holding the forward trenches, the enemy put down a barrage in the valley and all round the ridge from 10 in the morning till 4 in the afternoon, cutting off all communication with the rear by 'phone, signal or runner. Late in the evening anxious emissaries from the 23rd British and 17th French Divisions arrived at Battalion headquarters, and were both surprised and gratified to find that the Battalion was still in existence, and that the German shelling had not done any particular harm.

While in these parts the Battalion was visited by several officers of the Regiment—Colonel Burnett-Hitchcock, G.S.O.1, 47th Division, by Captain Foster, Brigade Major, 141st Infantry Brigade, and by Lieutenant-Colonel Becke and Captain Lang, who were serving with the Royal Flying Corps.

Early in March the Battalion took over trenches opposite Lens, next to the Naval Division, and on the 18th the Sherwood Foresters were inspected by the Commander-in-Chief, General Sir Douglas Haig, who expressed himself as very pleased with the appearance of the Battalion.

Digitized by Google

In April the weather, which had been very variable—hard frosts giving way to sudden thaws—grew fine, hot and dry, and the trenches rapidly became much more habitable, while, so far as the enemy was concerned, there was a spell of less shelling if perhaps an increased rifle activity. At the end of this month, when the Battalion had left the line for the Matringhem manœuvre area, the following officers were serving with it:—

Captain (Temporary Major) R. L. Sherbrooke (in command); Captain (Temporary Major) G. E. Venner, Special Reserve; Lieutenant C. H. G. Millis, Special Reserve (adjutant), Lieutenants J. B. Mudge, Special Reserve (transport officer), F. W. A. Coman (quartermaster), F. J. Menzies, Special Reserve (Lewis-gun officer), N. P. Birley (bombing officer), Second-Lieutenants W. W. G. Stables (billeting officer), C. F. Wolley-Dod (signalling officer), Lieutenant C. E. M. Woodford (sniping officer).

"*A*" *Company*.—Lieutenant (Temporary Captain) E. E. S. Taylor; Second-Lieutenants A. C. Willison, P. N. Cooper (company Lewis-gun officer), R. F. Moore, F. J. M. Shaw, and A. F. Heath.

"*B*" *Company*.—Lieutenant (Temporary Captain) C. R. Chambers, Second-Lieutenants P. E. Burrows, Special Reserve (Lewis-gun officer), C. B. Brindley, Special Reserve, N. A. McD. Walker, and R. E. Barringer.

"*C*" *Company*.—Lieutenant (Temporary Captain) C. Neville, Special Reserve; Lieutenants F. G. Stribling and J. W. Martyr (Lewis-gun officer); Second-Lieutenants W. M. Robinson, J. E. M. Walker and T. G. Beardall.

"*D*" *Company*.—Lieutenant (Temporary Captain) J. R. Webster, Lieutenant (Temporary Captain) K. N. Bion, Lieutenant B. C. Smith, Special Reserve; Second-Lieutenants C. Ambler and A. C. Lightfoot, Special Reserve (Lewis-gun officer).

During April there had been 40 casualties in the Battalion, while the total losses from the commencement of the war up to date amounted to 14 officers killed and 35 wounded, with 395 other ranks killed and 1,122 wounded.

Early in June General Babington, commanding the 23rd Division, held a special parade and inspection of the Battalion, on which occasion he complimented it on the admirable example it had set to the rest of the Division by its smartness, fine fighting qualities, and turn out.

During the eight months that the Battalion served in the 23rd Division, the G.O.C.'s guard was furnished by the 1st Battalion Sherwood Foresters without a break for nearly six months.

During May and June it became increasingly evident that some great offensive was in contemplation, and every opportunity was taken to practise the Battalion in all forms of attack whenever it was out of the line for however brief a period of time. In the first half of June a draft of 53 non-commissioned officers and men came up from the base, and five young officers joined—Second-Lieutenants F. W. Burt, S. P. Baron, H. G. B. Hopkins, H. W. Sargent and H. P. Rogers; and then, on June 23rd, news was received that the Division would move almost at once to the neighbourhood of Doullens, there to join the IInd Corps and the Fourth Army. No time was lost; the Battalion paraded at 3 p.m. the next day and marched from Fuguingatte, where for some days past it had been engaged in intensive training, and entrained at Lillers for Longueru,

Digitized by Google

about 1½ miles south-west of Amiens. This was reached in the early morning of the 25th, and the Foresters now marched through Amiens and Dreuil to Ailly-sur-Somme, where all arrangements were perfected for the big battle which appeared to be imminent, and as to the cause of which something must now be said.

During the past winter and spring considerable reinforcements had reached the British Army in France, while the strain and difficulties of producing men for the fighting services had been eased by the recent introduction in Great Britain of compulsory service. There were now four British armies in the field, the Second (Plumer) in the Ypres district, the First (Monro) opposite Neuve Chapelle, the Third (Allenby) covering the new French sector down to Arras, and the Fourth (Rawlinson) from Albert to the Somme, where was the left of the French. The spring of the year had witnessed the very determined German attack upon the Ypres salient, while in mid-March the pressure upon the French at Verdun had become very severe, and in order to afford some easement to our allies the British had taken over an additional twelve miles of front. At the end of March there had been heavy fighting about St. Eloi, and in April about the Loos salient; but it appeared that all this enemy activity had the double object of holding us to our ground while the Germans prosecuted their offensive at Verdun, and also of provoking a premature offensive on our part—since the Germans fully believed that an attack on a large scale was then contemplated.

"The principle of an offensive campaign during the summer of 1916 had already been decided upon by all the Allies. . . Preparations for our offensive had made considerable progress; but as the date on which the attack should begin was dependent on many doubtful factors, a final decision on that point was deferred until the general situation should become clearer."*

The British Commander-in-Chief was anxious to delay the attack as long as possible—his armies and munition supplies were growing, but while the former were far from being fully trained, the stocks of the latter were still inadequate for the growing needs of a battle of real magnitude. On the other hand, the Germans were seriously pressing the French at Verdun, while on the Italian front the Austrians appeared to be gaining ground. All things considered it was agreed by the Allied Commanders that an offensive must not be postponed much beyond the end of June, and that it should be directed from a point where the British and French lines met—the attack must be a combined one since neither of the allies was at that time strong enough to undertake, unaided, an attack on the grand scale. The offensive, then, was to be carried out by the Fourth British Army, under General Sir Henry Rawlinson, who held the front from Gommecourt across the Ancre valley to Maricourt; and by the Sixth French Army, commanded by General Fayolle, whose force lay from Maricourt, astride the Somme, to opposite the village of Fay.

"The enemy's position to be attacked was of a very formidable character, situated on a high undulating tract of ground, which rises to more than 500 feet above sea-level, and forms the watershed between the Somme on the one side and the rivers of south-west Belgium on the other. On the southern face of this watershed, the general trend of which is from east-south-east to west-north-west,

* Despatch of December 23rd, 1916.

Digitized by Google

the ground falls in a series of long irregular spurs and deep depressions to the valley of the Somme. Well down the forward slopes of this face the enemy's first system of defence, starting from the Somme near Curlu, ran at first north for 3,000 yards, then west for 7,000 yards to near Fricourt, where it turned nearly due south, forming a great salient angle in the enemy's line.

"Some 10,000 yards north of Fricourt the trenches crossed the river Ancre, a tributary of the Somme, and, still running north, passed over the summit of the watershed, about Hébuterne and Gommecourt, and then down its northern spurs to Arras. On the 20,000 yards front between the Somme and the Ancre the enemy had a strong second system of defence, sited generally on or near the southern crest of the highest part of the watershed, at an average distance of from 3,000 to 5,000 yards behind his first system of trenches. . . The first and second system each consisted of several lines of deep trenches, well-provided with bomb-proof shelters and with numerous communicating trenches connecting them. The front of the trenches in each system was protected by wire entanglements, many of them in belts 40 yards broad, built of iron stakes interlaced with barbed wire, often almost as thick as a man's finger."*

On the morning of June 29th the following information was published to the Battalion:—"The IInd Corps, of which the 23rd Division is now a part, will not be used to break through the German system of trenches. When the three main German systems of defence have been captured, the three cavalry corps, supported by the IInd Corps, will go through and advance in a north-westerly direction with the French forming a defensive right flank, thus capturing or causing the rapid retreat of all garrisons of the German front line trenches to the north of the main frontal attack."

On June 30th the Battalion marched via Longpré, Poulainville, and Coisy to Rainneville, which was reached about 9.15 p.m., moving next day some twelve miles to tents and bivouacs in Henencourt Wood.

The following were now told off to accompany the Battalion in the event of its going into action, all others remaining as reserve in the transport lines:—

Commanding Officer, Adjutant, Lewis-gun Officer, Bombing Officer, Sniping Officer; Regimental Sergeant-Major Morton in charge of Battalion ammunition column; H.Q. Lewis-gun section; 40 H.Q. bombers; Signalling-Sergeant Giles and 25 signallers; personnel of regimental aid post; armourer-sergeant; half the police; half the shoemakers; regimental barber; sports storeman; servants with their officers.

"*A*" *Company*.—Captain Taylor; Lieutenant Cooper; Second-Lieutenants Shaw, Sargent and Heath; other ranks, 152.

"*B*" *Company*.—Captain Bion; Second-Lieutenants Wolley-Dod, Barringer, Burt and Rogers; other ranks, 159.

"*C*" *Company*.—Captain Neville; Lieutenant Martyr; Second-Lieutenants Robinson and Walker; other ranks, 171.

"*D*" *Company*.—Captain Webster; Second-Lieutenants Lightfoot, Thrupp and Baron; other ranks, 149.

There were now several further moves; after some three days spent quietly in Henencourt Wood, hearing good news of the allied attacks, the Foresters

* Despatch of December 23rd, 1916.

Digitized by Google

marched via Buire to Dernancourt on the Ancre, passing on the way the 21st and 32nd Divisions coming out of the line for a rest; and at 8 on the evening of the 4th orders came in for the Battalion to be ready to move at short notice, "possibly to be attached to the 19th Division to support a night attack."

A car from the Division took Colonel Sherbrooke on ahead at 9 o'clock in the evening, and the Battalion marched off at 10.30 p.m. The orders received by the 24th Brigade and the Commanding Officer were to the effect that the Battalion was "to take over the captured line in La Boisselle and make a bombing attack with one company the following morning to clean up a small section of the enemy's position;" but on reaching the headquarters of the brigade holding the line, the Commanding Officer found that no continuous captured line did, in actual fact, exist, that the situation in the village of La Boisselle was obscure, that there were no guides available, and that the 57th Brigade was relying upon the Battalion to carry out an attack on a large scale without previous reconnaissance or preparation of any description.

When he eventually arrived at the forward positions, the Commanding Officer found chaotic elements of five different units and no front line, and the leading companies of the Battalion, which had had to load up with small arms ammunition, Stokes mortar and Mills bombs, only reached the jumping-off positions selected at daybreak, the communication trenches being very long and terribly congested.

The Battalion, alone of the 24th Brigade, marched off at 10.30 p.m. in the belief that it was to hold a line in La Boisselle for the night and make a bomb attack the following afternoon, but on reaching the barrier on the Albert-Pozières road, near the Tara line, about 12.30 on the morning of the 5th, all ranks began to load up with Stokes mortar and Mills bombs, and then received the following instructions from the Brigadier-General commanding the 57th Brigade, under whose orders the 1st Sherwood Foresters had now been placed: "To attack that day, capture and consolidate a line which was pointed out near La Boisselle." Moving off two companies at a time progress was very slow, as the guides were not at all sure of their way and the communication trenches were long and much congested, but the companies at last reached their destination and took up a position in a support line near the church at La Boisselle.

The trenches and dug-outs were full of troops belonging to the 57th Brigade, but by degrees some of these were withdrawn and the crowding relieved.

Having made such reconnaissance of the ground as was, under the circumstances, possible, Lieutenant-Colonel Sherbrooke gave orders that the attack on the enemy position should be made by three parties from three separate starting points, each party or column consisting of one company with Lewis-gunners and bombers, of a strength of 184 each; a definite object was allotted to each column, and the rest of the Battalion was to remain in reserve under the Commanding Officer. These orders had to be modified, as two companies, which were to have been supplied by the 57th Brigade as a general reserve, did not materialize, so it was decided to push on with the right and left columns, following with the centre column as soon as the others had reached their objectives.

The right column advanced in touch with the battalion on its right, but the left was held up by a strong enemy work; the centre then moved forward, but was

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

checked by a huge block of earth twelve feet in height, and, after several costly attempts to overcome it, the column was forced to give ground as its flanks had become exposed to the attacks of the enemy bombers, the right column, after gaining its objective, having been driven back by bombs, while the left column had been held up from the very start.

In view of this situation the Commanding Officer decided to take in the remaining Battalion reserves, with a view to enabling the left column to gain its objective, but at the end of an hour's close-quarter fighting only seven of the original fifty other ranks of the Headquarter detachment remained, and it was only owing to the courage and presence of mind of Sergeant Raynes, the Battalion bombing-sergeant, that the Commanding Officer did not also become a casualty from a German hand-grenade that dropped between Raynes and the Commanding Officer unseen by the latter. Sergeant Raynes caught the grenade before it dropped and threw it clear of the trench, but not before it had exploded and seriously wounded him in the hand and arm.

Fighting continued for some hours at close quarters, but by 7 p.m. all the companies of the Foresters, except "D," had been driven back, and though this company had captured and made good its objective, it also had to be recalled about 9 p.m., as there was risk of it being cut off, and all were brought back to the original front line. At 2 a.m. on the 6th the Battalion was relieved, and returned to billets at Dernancourt.

It was afterwards ascertained that a regiment of the Prussian Guards Division had been brought up to counter-attack and recapture La Boisselle, and that this counter-attack and the attack by the Battalion had coincided almost exactly. Although the Battalion was not successful in advancing the line captured by the 57th Brigade, it at least prevented the recapture of La Boisselle, and fought with the greatest bravery against a numerically superior enemy consisting of the finest troops in the German Army. The casualties in officers and senior non-commissioned officers were very heavy, and included the company commanders of "B," "C" and "D" Companies (Captains Webster, Bion and Neville), and the adjutant (Lieutenant Millis). The Battalion also suffered a great loss in the death of Company Sergeant-Major Cox ("A" Company), who was killed gallantly leading an assault on an enemy strong point. This warrant officer had set a magnificent example to all ranks of the Battalion by his personal courage, devotion to duty, and *esprit de corps*.

Of this action the General Officer Commanding the 23rd Division (General Babington) wrote as under to the Brigadier-General commanding the 24th Infantry Brigade:—

"The G.O.C. considers that the Battalion was placed in a difficult position. How far this was avoidable it is impossible for him to judge, and, much as he sympathises with the Battalion, he feels that no good end would be served by opening up the question. He is satisfied that the Battalion did its duty and fought up to the best standard of its traditions."

In addition, General Babington ordered a special parade of the 1st Battalion Sherwood Foresters on July 6th, when he expressed "his sympathy with the Battalion for having been given so hard a task to perform at short notice and with little opportunity of preparation. But while expressing his sympathy with

Digitized by Google

all ranks for the losses sustained, he congratulated the Battalion on the excellent reports he had received of their conduct the day before, and expressed his conviction that when called upon they would do equally well with their own Brigade."

Brigadier-General Oxley, commanding the 24th Infantry Brigade, also, on a later date, spoke to the Foresters of their good work at La Boisselle, and also wrote to the Colonel of the Regiment.

The following letter was received from General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien:

"*July 30th*, 1916.

"*It was with much pride I read in the 'Times' how splendidly the old Sherwood Foresters have done again. From a letter from General Oxley to General Shaw, which I have seen, I give you an extract.*

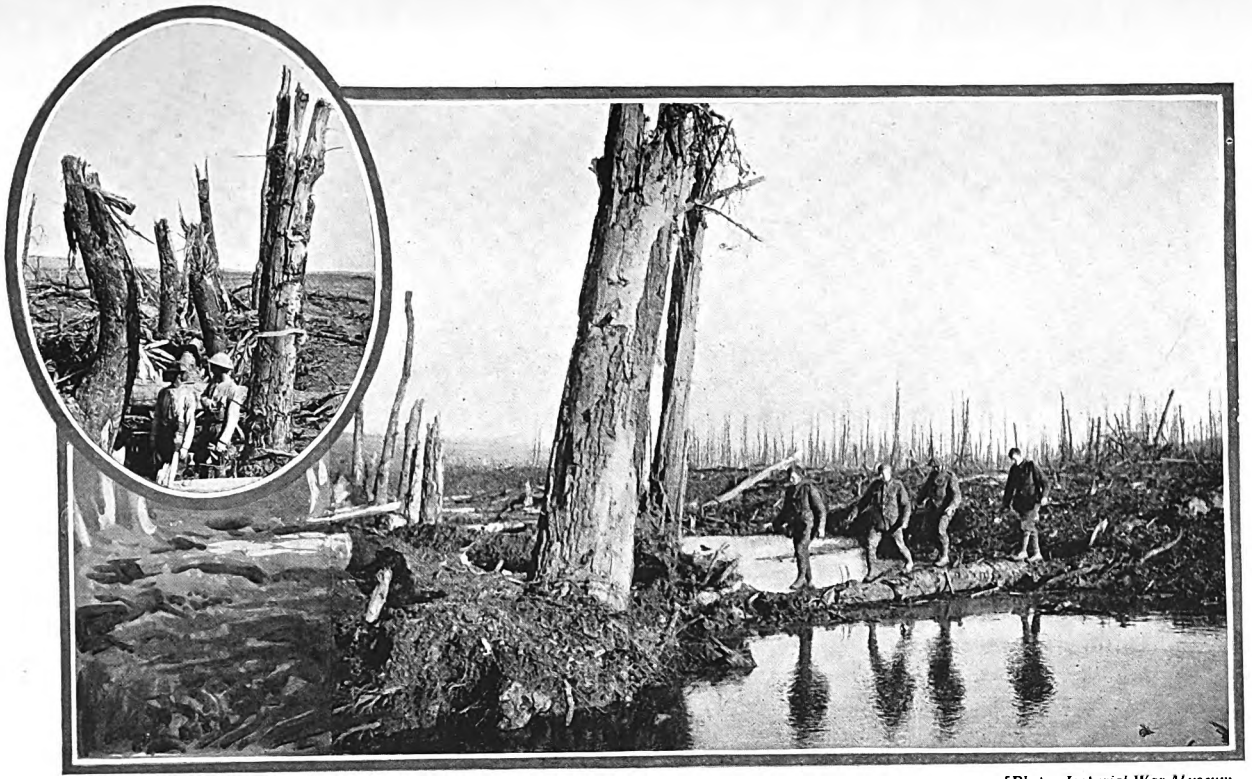
"'*I am writing to ask you whether you can do anything to help the 1st Sherwood Foresters in the way of officers, and to tell you about them. They were detached from my brigade for two days and sent to reinforce another brigade. Whilst away they lost fairly heavily, and three of the company commanders (Webster, Neville and Bion) were wounded, also Millis, the adjutant. Venner, acting as second-in-command, has also been killed since. The Battalion has done splendidly, and I hear nothing but praise for it in the attack when it was away from me. Sherbrooke has great difficulties to contend with owing to the want of trained officers, but he has kept up the Battalion in an efficient and fighting condition worthy of the Regiment.*'"

On July 7th the Battalion moved from Dernancourt and took up a position along Fricourt Wood and Lonely Copse, and at midday or somewhat later was ordered up to Shelter Wood, marching by platoons at 100 yards interval, but coming under shell fire soon after starting. A fresh position was now assumed along the west and south-west sides of Shelter Wood, mainly occupying shell holes and being heavily bombarded from the first moment of arrival here. Towards evening orders were received to occupy a trench in front of Shelter Wood, but as this was found to be already overcrowded with men of several different regiments, it was decided to withdraw the Foresters to a line behind the wood and covering the exit from it. The four companies then formed a defensive line some 200—400 yards in rear of the wood by joining up the many shell holes; shelling was continuous throughout the day.

Rations and hot food reached the men of the Battalion just before dawn on the 8th, but, in their efforts to carry up rations, Sergeant-Drummer Tomlinson and most of his drummers were killed or wounded.

Early this morning the Brigadier ordered the companies holding this shell-hole line to withdraw a few men at a time, and Patch Alley was then occupied, the Battalion remaining there all day. Towards afternoon it was reported that the enemy had evacuated the village of Contalmaison, and that the British were holding Bailiff Wood, and orders were then at once issued that operations for holding and consolidating the village would shortly commence. But the enemy now put down a very heavy barrage, and it being discovered that the reports above mentioned were wholly unfounded, the projected operations came to nothing, while the heavy enemy shelling caused several casualties in the

Digitized by Google



[Photo, Imperial War Museum

1. **A Trench in High Wood after a Bombardment.**

2. **A Useful Bridge caused by a Fallen Tree.**

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Battalion—of the officers, Major Venner being killed and Lieutenants Burrows and Mason wounded.

There were many rumours of enemy counter-attacks, but nothing happened, and the night passed quietly except for a certain amount of shelling. The Brigade maintained the positions occupied until well into the afternoon of the 10th, when its units were relieved, and the Sherwood Foresters marched back to Dernancourt for the night, moving next day to billets in Bresle.

The following extract from the report by the General Officer Commanding 69th Brigade, on the attack on Contalmaison, bears tribute to the good work of the 24th Brigade in these operations, and its share in their successful issue :—

" *There is no doubt that but for the gallant efforts made by the 24th and 68th Brigades during the previous days, the task of the 69th Brigade would have been much more difficult.*" General Babington added :—" *I entirely concur in these remarks.*"

On the 14th the Battalion left Bresle and the 23rd Division, and moving by road and rail via Poulainville, Longeau and Fouquereuil, reached their billets on the night of the 15th at Labeuvrière, when the Battalion was met by General Hudson, who welcomed them back to the 8th, their original division, in the following words :—

" *Colonel Sherbrooke, officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers of the Sherwood Foresters.*

" *I have come to welcome you back to the 8th Division, and I may say that we are very glad indeed to have you back with us once more. You have seen heavy fighting with the 8th Division—at Neuve Chapelle and Fromelles—and you have now returned from more heavy fighting on the Somme. I know the Regiment possesses a spirit which enables it to win through in spite of hard blows it may receive, and after each resurrection it is stronger than before.*

" *The Germans are receiving heavy punishment now, and we must be ready to push on and strike again and again whenever opportunity offers.*"

The casualties during this month, or actually during only the first week of it, had been very heavy—9 officers and 51 other ranks having been killed or having died of wounds, while 9 officers and 257 non-commissioned officers and men were wounded, and 6 men were missing—a total loss of 326 men. The names of the officers who died were Major G. E. Venner, Captain C. Neville, Lieutenants P. N. Cooper and F. G. Stribling, Second-Lieutenants F. W. Burt, H. P. Rogers, F. J. M. Shaw, S. P. Baron and H. W. Sargent; the wounded officers were Captains J. R. Webster and K. N. Bion, Lieutenants C. H. G. Millis and C. H. Sands, Second-Lieutenants W. M. Robinson, R. M. Thrupp, J. E. M. Walker, P. E. Burrows and H. G. Mason.

On July 20th the 24th Brigade was inspected near La Buisière by General Sir Charles Monro, the Army Commander, and two days later the Battalion moved to La Bourse, and by the end of the month had gone up to the support line at Maison Rouge, with the 17th Battalion of the Regiment, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Milward, holding part of the line to the left, just north of the La Bassée Canal.

This month the wastage in officers was to some extent made good by the arrival of the following from home, or from the base or other battalions :—

Digitized by Google

Captain Gleave, Lieutenants Gray, Gauntlett, Woodford, Scott and Bowmer, Second-Lieutenants Bridges, Hovell, Neilson, Crellin, Caunt, Elliott, Giles and Pearse.

Of the result of the opening days of the Somme battle, Sir Douglas Haig wrote as follows in his despatch :—

"To sum up the results of the fighting of these five days, on a front of over six miles, from the Briqueterie to La Boisselle, our troops had swept over the whole of the enemy's first and strongest system of defence, which he had done his utmost to render impregnable. They had driven him back over a distance of more than a mile, and had carried four elaborately fortified villages.

"The number of prisoners passed back to the Corps cages at the close of the 5th July had already reached the total of 94 officers and 5,724 other ranks."

On Sunday, August 6th, there was what the Commanding Officer, in a letter home, calls "rather an interesting show, when Sir Charles Monro had a huge parade service of representatives of every unit in the First Army—there were about 6,000 men in the Central Grande Place, Bethune, and a lot of French generals, etc. We marched past afterwards and were jolly lucky to get away, because Fritz had several 'planes over and dropped several bombs in the course of the day, while the next day he shelled the Grande Place with a 15-inch gun—for the first time since November, 1915, so evidently the Germans had tolerably good information that some large-scale ceremony was taking place."

On the 8th the Foresters left Bethune again for the trenches in the Quarry sector, moving via Beuvry, Sailly-la-Bourse, and Vermelles; the weather on the whole was fine and warm, and though the enemy was fairly enterprising the casualties were not especially heavy. At this time Captain Arnott, 2nd East Lancashire Regiment, was posted to the Battalion as second-in-command, but he only remained some four weeks, when he was relieved by Major E. N. T. Collin, of our Regiment, who had lately been officiating as second-in-command of a battalion of the Worcestershire Regiment.

There was one officer casualty during August—Lieutenant Hovell being gassed and dying from the effects; in his place Second-Lieutenant Springham was posted from the 19th Battalion of the Regiment.

For the greater part of August the Battalion were in the trenches facing Loos, and the continual mining operations were somewhat wearing to the nerves of those who had to sit on top and wait for the explosion to take place. During this period the enemy blew up upwards of seven mines in this sector, but on the whole the Battalion was lucky, and escaped with comparatively few casualties.

During September an increased frontage was allotted to the Battalion on every occasion that it went up to the trenches; beginning with a front of no more than 800 yards, this was increased later to 1,500 yards, and a day or two afterwards the Foresters had to be responsible for a frontage previously occupied by three infantry battalions; this could only be done by adopting a new system of defence suggested by Colonel Sherbrooke—occupying a few strong points only, and filling up all saps which did not possess some real military importance. During the latter part of this month Lieutenant B. H. Scott was busily engaged in preparing for a small raid to be made by the Battalion at some future date, in conjunction with gas attacks and a larger raid by the battalion on the right.

Digitized by Google

On the 27th three officers were sent to join the 2nd Battalion; these were Second-Lieutenants Gauntlett, Slater and Springham.

The projected raid duly came off the next time that the Battalion was up in the front line, and the operations are thus described in the war diary, under date of October 4th and following days:—

"Enemy fairly quiet. Our trench mortars fired on the enemy's wire throughout the day—bursts of rapid fire as on the two previous evenings. The raiding party, under Lieutenant Scott, came up in the evening from Gosnay" (where was situated a raiding school) "and made a final reconnaissance of the enemy's wire; this they reported to be very little cut by our trench mortar fire.

"5th. Enemy quiet all day. Our Stokes and medium trench mortars fired on the enemy's wire throughout the day. The raiding party arrived about 6.30 p.m., and was issued with special stores, knobkerries, tape, etc., for the raid. At 8 p.m. gas was discharged all along the front occupied by 'D' Company, and was followed up by two further discharges at 8.45 p.m. and 10.30 p.m., each of the three being accompanied by a discharge of smoke on the left of the gas attack by 'B' and 'C' Companies. The enemy's retaliation was slight and chiefly in the front line at one point in 'B' Company, where considerable damage was done and several casualties caused, these including Second-Lieutenant P. H. H. Gray (severely wounded) and Sergeant Butcher, who was very severely wounded and died the next day. At 12.37 the raiding party was due to start, but was considerably delayed by the Royal Engineers who were engaged in disconnecting the gas cylinders in the front line. Consequently, the party was only half-way over when the artillery barrage began at 1.7 a.m., and, being further delayed by shells falling short, were only just on the enemy's wire when the signal for recall was given. One man was badly gassed by falling into a shell-hole just outside our parapet.

"Permission was asked for and obtained to repeat the raid, when the party, reinforced by Second-Lieutenant Crellin, went out again at 4.12 a.m. in three groups as before. The centre and left were held up by groups in the enemy's trench and, after some bombing, retired; the right, under Second-Lieutenant Crellin, got into the enemy's trench, searched it for about 150 yards, and finding no one, finally retired. All were in by 5.15 a.m. In the two attempts one man was badly gassed, one severely and two slightly wounded.

"6th. At about 2 p.m. the Commanding Officer asked for and obtained permission to repeat the raid, but without any trench mortar or artillery preparation or barrage. Captain Gleave and Second-Lieutenant Giles were asked to lead the party, with Second-Lieutenant Crellin as guide. 'A' Company was called on for volunteers; these were easily procured and reinforced by a few volunteers from the Headquarter Company, making about 33 in all. The party left our trenches about 7.30 p.m. and met with no opposition, the whole party entering the enemy's trench by the same gap in the wire and then dividing, Second-Lieutenant Crellin and Captain Gleave going to the left, and Second-Lieutenant Giles to the right. The right party traversed 300 yards of trench without meeting a single German; the left met five men, who at once bolted—one was killed and another wounded, and identifications were obtained showing the men as belonging to the 245th Reserve Regiment. The whole party returned

Digitized by Google

by 8.45 p.m., having had two men slightly wounded, and several, including Captain Gleave and Second-Lieutenant Crellin, slightly affected by gas which still hung about the long grass in No Man's Land."

Early in October information was received that the Division was to return to the Somme, and on October 14th there was a move, the Battalion proceeding by road and rail, 'bus and motor-lorry, and by way of Fouquereuil, St. Pol, Doullens, Pont Rémy, Sorel, Ailly-sur-Somme and Amiens to Ville-sous-Corbie, whence the Foresters marched to Sandpits Camp; from here, on the 17th, the commanding officer, adjutant and company commanders went up by motor lorries to the 6th Division Headquarters, at Bernafay Wood, and from thence on foot to the trenches.

"The Second Battalion," wrote Colonel Sherbrooke in a letter home, "has done awfully well in this show and earned the special thanks of the Corps Commander, Lord Cavan. They are, of course, very much depressed at losing poor old Hobbs, who died on the 19th. I had been told by the Corps Commander that Hobbs had twice been top of the list for a brigade, and that only his wound three months ago and his death this week stopped his promotion. He was very highly thought of, and his death is a great blow to the whole Regiment and the Army. He was a very fine C.O. and brave almost to foolhardiness. I visited his grave and put a wreath on it."

On the 19th the Battalion left camp in the early morning and marched via Fricourt, Mametz, Montauban and Bernafay Cross Roads to Trônes Wood, arriving here about midday. It had been pouring with rain throughout the night, and continued doing so all the 19th, the road was much blocked by traffic, and the troops had to march on side tracks in most places at least four inches deep in mud; the traffic caused frequent halts, and the fatigue of the men was extreme. Leaving Trônes Wood, the rest of the route was through a veritable sea of mud, intermixed with many shell-holes; conditions became worse as the march continued, progress was very slow, and men were continually falling into shell-holes and spraining their ankles and having to be hauled out, while some were not missed and remained where they were, unable from sheer exhaustion to extricate themselves. By the time the men reached the trenches hardly a rifle was in working order, all being choked with mud.

The Somme battle was still raging along many miles of front, and "on the 23rd October, and again on November 5th, attacks on the enemy's positions to the east of Les Bœufs and Gueudecourt were renewed, in conjunction with French operations against the Sailly-Saillisel heights and St. Pierre Vaast Wood. Considerable further progress was achieved by the 4th and 8th Divisions. Our footing on the crest of the Le Transloy spur was extended and secured, and the much-contested tangle of trenches at our junction with the French left at last passed definitely into our possession. Many smaller gains were made in this neighbourhood by local assaults during these days, in spite of the difficult conditions of the ground."*

In the operations indicated in the above the Battalion was not very actively engaged; when the attack by the 4th and 8th British Divisions and by the

* Despatch of December 23rd, 1916.

Digitized by Google

[*Crown Copyright.*

SAILLY SAILLISEL.

[*Photo. Imperia War Museum.*

A VIEW ON THE OUTSIDE OF DELVILLE WOOD.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

French commenced on the afternoon of October 23rd, the Foresters were in divisional reserve; that evening two companies were sent to reinforce the 25th Brigade, and were kept back in reserve in Rose Trench, in case of counter-attack, while the remaining companies were used as carrying parties to Les Bœufs. On the evening of the 24th the whole Battalion was temporarily transferred to the 25th Brigade, and was concentrated in Tatler Trench; on the night of the 25th it relieved two battalions of the 25th Brigade in the front line in Cloudy and Misty Trenches. Several prisoners were taken belonging to the 15th, 72nd and 392nd Regiments. The Battalion was to have attacked the junction of Zenith and Sunshine Trenches, in conjunction with the 2nd Devons, but, in consideration of the extreme exhaustion of the men, the venture was abandoned, and the Battalion was finally relieved on the morning of the 29th and withdrew to Sandpits Camp.

During the latter part of this month the Battalion had been very highly tried. On the top of a 24-days' tour of the trenches, under the continuous fire of heavy trench mortars, the Foresters were called upon to carry out three raids on the enemy trenches, one in conjunction with a gas attack. After two days' rest the Battalion was sent down for a second time to take part in the Somme fighting, and at the end of a very trying march was placed in the line, and, though the casualties were not great, the strain was heavy and prolonged. The services of the transport, ration and supply parties were beyond all praise, and they never failed their comrades at the front. The losses this month were 31 killed and 93 wounded.

Writing home on November 2nd, the commanding officer said:—"We have again been in action and have, I rejoice to say, had only very slight casualties, but the rain and mud have been too horrible. The complete exhaustion of all concerned is a thing that must be felt and seen to be properly appreciated. . . . Well, we have finished our second and probably our last trip in this neighbourhood, and to-morrow we go back to near a large town on a large river, for rest and re-fitting. We got a few prisoners in our little effort, including one officer, and a Russian prisoner of war who escaped from somewhere in Germany and has been living on nuts and wheat; the poor devil was very bucked at our recapturing him. A good many Boches have been giving themselves up lately—well over a hundred on our divisional front alone."

Colonel Sherbrooke's agreeable anticipations were not fulfilled; there was no very early and protracted period of rest, and it was actually not until November 20th that the Battalion proceeded by train, via Amiens and Longpré, to Airaines, whence there was a march of 12 kilometres to Selincourt, where the Foresters were accommodated in exceedingly comfortable billets, while the Battalion headquarters was housed in a chateau which at one time had been used as General Headquarters. Here a draft of 103 men arrived, under charge of Lieutenant Sands, who had been wounded when serving with the Battalion at La Boisselle on July 5th.

The 8th Division was now under command of Major-General Heneker, D.S.O., who in this month succeeded General Hudson, appointed Adjutant-General in India.

Digitized by Google

Christmas Day, 1916, was the first spent in billets, and everything possible was done to give all ranks a good time, and the many gifts received from a large variety of "Comforts Funds" were distributed.

All too soon did the period of rest and relaxation come to an end, for on December 29th the Battalion left Selincourt for the Albert area, marching to Oisemont via Promesnil and St. Maulvis, and proceeding thence by train to the neighbourhood of Combles, where the Foresters went into camp.

The casualties in the Battalion at the end of this—the second year of the war—amounted to 73 officers and 2,142 other ranks killed, wounded and missing.

Digitized by Google

Map 3

CHAPTER IV.

1917.

THE THIRD BATTLE OF YPRES.

Battle Honour: "*Ypres.*"

THE 1st Battalion Sherwood Foresters remained in the quarters where the end of 1916 had found it until January 11th, 1917, when, very early in the morning, it marched to Mericourt for entraining, which was carried out about 9 a.m. The train had not, however, proceeded very far on its way when it broke down between Allery and Oisemont, the accident causing some five hours' delay and necessitating the detrainment at Oisemont being carried out in darkness. On arrival here the Battalion marched to, and was billeted in, two villages named Frette Cuisse and Le Fay.

While quartered here the command of the 24th Infantry Brigade changed hands, Brigadier-General Cobham, D.S.O., relieving Brigadier-General Eden, D.S.O., when training of all kinds was prosecuted with assiduity. Here a large number of young officers joined the Battalion—Second-Lieutenants G. Hemingway, E. B. Greensmith, G. D. M. Abbotts, J. W. Davidson, C. E. Cumberland, A. Knowles, J. C. Stimson, and J. A. Searle, while Captain Goodwyn, Lieutenants Malcouronne and Benford also reported their arrival for duty. Towards the end of the month the Division was ordered back to the Somme area for a third tour of duty, this time in the XVth Corps, under General Sir J. Du Cane, and on the 22nd the Battalion proceeded by rail and road by way of Morlancourt, Bray and Suzanne, to a camp some ten miles east of Albert, where the companies arrived, in hard frost, on the 25th, relieving the 14th Highland Light Infantry next day in the trenches in the North Bouchavesnes sector.

The Battalion diary records that "during this tour of the trenches the Battalion experienced the hardest frost it has ever known, on several nights there being 23 degrees of frost; the water supply was seriously hampered, fires having to be lit under the water taps and ice continuously broken in the tubs. The Drums attempted to play at 'Retreat,' but were unable to do so owing to the flute key-pads becoming frozen as the men played. It was impossible to carry out any trench improvements, as the hardness of the ground broke the pick shafts. In one shell-hole the ice proved to be six feet thick, and the frost was found to have penetrated to a depth of eight feet into the ground. Night work, consequently, consisted mainly of wiring for the front line companies and carrying for the support companies."

Early in February there were rumours that the Brigade was to carry out a local "push," and on February 10th the Battalion went back to a camp near Bray, on the Somme between Albert and Corbie, where a very intensive training

Digitized by Google

was entered upon, the attack being carefully practised over so-called "picture trenches," and where, incidentally, there was a considerable amount of sickness. At this camp Major E. N. T. Collin, the second-in-command, left the Battalion to take up the appointment of Camp Commandant at Curlu.

On March 2nd the Foresters moved up from the camp of which during the preceding days they had been in occupation, and marched to Asquith Flats, where they were to rest for the night before going up to the attack. The weather had now turned colder again after a recent thaw, and the ground was by this sufficiently hard to enable the men to move quickly, and when, at 6 p.m. on the 3rd, Headquarters of the Battalion moved to its allotted post, the companies went straight on to the assaulting lines; their distribution was as follows: "A" Company was attached to the 1st Worcester Regiment as "carriers," "B" to the 2nd Northamptons in the same capacity, and "C" and "D" to the 2nd Northamptons and 1st Worcesters respectively as "moppers-up." The assaulting battalions were formed up on taped lines at about 2 a.m. on March 4th.

The object to be attained was the capture of the ridge immediately south of St. Pierre Vaast Wood, which the French had twice captured and had as often been driven from.

At 5.15 a.m. our barrage opened, and within three minutes the Germans had got theirs going, practically before our men had commenced to move forward, and the casualties in the first few moments were naturally rather heavy. In the platoon led by No. 11378 Sergeant Kemp, nine men were hit by one enemy shell, but the sergeant displayed remarkable coolness and courage, rallying his men, who were naturally much shaken, reorganizing the rest of the platoon, and leading his men forward through the enemy fire into the front line trenches. As our men entered the enemy's lines the Germans were just emerging from their dug-outs, and while the assaulting battalions went straight on to Pallas Support Trench, our "moppers-up" remained behind to clean up Pallas Trench. The enemy, however, had prepared, and was still holding, several bombing posts, and these were the main obstacles which had to be overcome, so that there was much hand-to-hand fighting between our men and the Germans. No. 13191 Private Caunt, hearing bombing in the trench near him, at once rushed to the spot and found a small party held up by a strong enemy post, and having already lost an officer and seven men in attempting to capture the position. Private Caunt, realizing that the situation was becoming serious, pushed his way through his comrades and rushed along the intermediate portion of the trench, although bombs were still falling in it. Appearing suddenly round the traverse, he took the seven Germans there completely by surprise, and, upon ordering them to surrender, they at once complied.

Groups had been told off for clearing dug-outs, in the process of "mopping-up," and No. 10345 Sergeant Ferguson, when in command of one, made his way single-handed into several of these and brought out those of the enemy who were lurking at the bottom. Twice he went down into deep dug-outs, even when met with opposition, and cleared them of their occupants. While "C" and "D" Companies were thus engaged in mopping-up, "A" and "B" were carrying ammunition and material from the original front line to Pallas Front

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

and Support Trenches, crossing over No Man's Land continuously through heavy enemy fire. Their work carried with it none of the excitement which fell to the other two companies, but the way in which all ranks of "A" and "B" stuck to their task brought great credit to all concerned. On several occasions when the non-commissioned officers had become casualties, the older privates immediately took command and led their men over the open. Three times did fires break out in dumps, but these were quickly extinguished, and on one occasion No. 58692 Lance-Corporal Jarratt saved one dump by his personal bravery in removing bombs from the burning heap.

By untiring devotion to duty, the stretcher bearers succeeded in evacuating practically all the wounded from Pallas Trench, No. 7071 Private Mills crossing No Man's Land between twenty-five and thirty times.

By 6.15 a.m. all objectives had been taken and held, and the "mopping-up" companies had completely cleared the new support trenches. During the day the enemy made four local counter-attacks, but in no single case did he succeed in penetrating our line. About 9 p.m. "A" and "B" Companies were withdrawn, "C" and "D," however, remaining in the line until the morning of the 5th, when they were relieved by "A" and "B."

Writing home of these operations, Lieutenant-Colonel Sherbrooke said:—"The whole thing was admirably planned and executed, and, besides giving us command of a large tract of country, did the men a lot of good, the casualties being slight and the *kudos* great. We unfortunately had a larger percentage of killed than we have ever had before, and, amongst many others, lost a very gallant boy called Gleave, who came from somewhere in Nottingham." The total loss was actually 35 killed and 67 wounded; Captain Gleave was hit by a shell and killed instantaneously, when going up on the 5th, while Lieutenants Hall and Davidson were killed on the 4th, carrying material to the front line. A very large percentage of the casualties occurred amongst platoon commanders and senior non-commissioned officers, thus throwing much responsibility upon the junior ranks.

The 8th Division, by capturing the high ground, rendered Aldershot Valley secure from enemy observation, and gave the British command of all the surrounding country.

"On the 6th March," wrote the Battalion Commanding Officer, "we took over the captured line, and the same night our patrols reported that the Boches had cleared out of their front line trenches. I exploited this fact by sending forward our Battle Patrol Platoon, a select body of criminals who, in return for not doing any fatigues or other unpleasant duties, are guaranteed to cause alarm and despondency and, incidentally, considerable danger to any Boches they are invited to attack. I had some difficulty in persuading them to return before daylight, as they found that the enemy had cleared right out of three lines of trenches, and were actually evacuating the town of Moislains, which place the Battle Patrol Platoon were extremely anxious to capture. We got it a day or two later, and also won some renown through having been the first battalion in the Army to discover that the enemy had begun their famous retreat from the Somme. From this day on we had a most delightful time, slowly pursuing the

Digitized by Google

Germans over charming country and all thoroughly enjoying outposts and skirmishing after our dose of trench warfare." Lieutenant Willison commanded the Battle Patrol until it was wiped out at the Battle of Gouzeaucourt. He specially mentions the services of Privates Concanon and Phillips.

On the morning of the 24th the Battalion marched via Bouchavesnes and Cranière to Moislains, a village in a very shattered condition—"what our artillery had left undone the Germans had completed, many of the cellars being demolished and practically no houses being left standing"; and here, on the 29th, orders were received for the 8th Division to attack on the following day, the 24th Brigade being in reserve. The attack was successfully carried out by the 23rd and 25th Infantry Brigades, the services of the 24th Brigade not being called upon, and on April 1st the Battalion moved into brigade reserve at Nurlu.

On the events of the next few days the diary gives the following account:—"April 3rd. The Battle Patrol Platoon was ordered to advance at 10 p.m. to drive back any enemy patrols met with, and to occupy a line of resistance running from Chapel Crossing to W.5.d.20.95. The right patrol advanced on Chapel Crossing and captured it after some opposition, and during these operations one German was killed and one of our men slightly wounded. This patrol pursued a party of four or five of the enemy who ran away from Chapel Crossing for some 500 yards in the direction of Villers-Guislain, eventually losing them in the snow and sleet which was falling at the time, and, returning to Chapel Crossing, there dug in. Several newly-dug trenches and snipers' holes were met with, and in one of these a fire was burning. The trenches here average six feet deep and two feet broad, and have a rough overhead cover. The centre patrol advanced on two points, but little opposition was encountered, the enemy, usually in pairs, clearing out in every case after firing a few shots. The left patrol worked in two groups—one, about 100 yards south of the Revelon—Gouzeaucourt Road, advancing through W.5.d. Central, and the other about 500 yards north of the road. This patrol encountered considerable opposition from the enemy riflemen, and one of our men was wounded, but, by assisting each other with flanking movements, they were eventually able to reach their objectives."

On the 4th the 25th Brigade attacked Gouzeaucourt, and during the afternoon a party of Germans crept up under cover to within 15 or 20 yards of the left Lewis-gun post in the main resistance line, and a hand-to-hand fight ensued, the enemy being repulsed after a sharp encounter; one German was severely and one Forester slightly wounded. There was much give-and-take this day; Chapel Crossing was occupied by the Germans and retaken by "C" Company of the Battalion, and it was not until the 12th that Gouzeaucourt was finally captured and held. During this day Battalion headquarters moved up to Queen's Crossing, and the companies lined up behind the line of resistance held by the 2nd Northampton Regiment. "B" and "D" Companies were in the front line on the right and left respectively, with the two others in support. On our barrage lifting at 8.30 p.m., the companies advanced with great dash, swept aside all opposition, and gained their objectives and consolidated their gains—the line of the sunken road from Metz to Gouzeaucourt—sending out parties to drive back any enemy patrols. The casualties in our companies were light,

Digitized by Google

but the enemy suffered severely. The Battle Platoon met with considerable resistance, and was temporarily held up by thick wire in front of the village and a strong enemy post in rear of the wire, but they broke through, dispersed the enemy, and occupied the village. The enemy shelled the village heavily throughout the night, causing several casualties.

On the evening of the 12th the Battalion was relieved, but was sent forward again next morning with orders to advance and straighten matters out on the right flank; there was much opposition by machine-gun and rifle fire, the wire in front was thick and unbroken, and the Battalion was finally forced back to its original line, having incurred many casualties, amongst which were two officers wounded—Lieutenants Sheldon and Searle, and the total killed and wounded this month amounted to 83. During the remainder of April the Battalion was at Heudecourt and Villers-Guislain, engaged in heavy fatigue work, improving the line and the communications.

In May the 8th Division was withdrawn from the front line for training for something big in the near future. The weather was generally fine and occasionally quite hot; but towards the end of the month warning orders for a move northwards were received, and on the 29th—an ideal day for marching—the Battalion left its camp, and moving by Haut Allayne, Maricourt, Chipilly, Sailly Lorette, Vaux, Corbie, and La Neuville, there entrained for Godvaersvelde, and marched thence to billets at Moolenacker, which was reached on June 3rd; here the Battalion was placed in G.H.Q. reserve.

The 8th Division was now in the XIVth Corps, commanded by General Lord Cavan, in the Fourth Army under General Rawlinson.

"I was sorry," writes Lieutenant-Colonel Sherbrooke, "to leave the Somme, with its delightful country and open fighting, and also to know that we were returning to Flanders, which country I have always loathed; but the fact that we had been specially asked for by Lord Cavan and were joining his corps, composed of the four best divisions in the Army, helped us to get over our regrets. I have not said much about the Somme country evacuated by the Germans, as you will have read about it *ad nauseam* in all the newspapers at the time, but I confess that I did not conceive it possible that any civilised army would, or could, so utterly destroy a countryside in its retreat. I asked a Boche prisoner one day how he liked cutting down half a dozen half-grown little fruit trees in some wretched peasant's one-acre farm, and he told me that none of them—not even their officers—liked doing it, but that it was an order from on high and had to be obeyed; he also told me that one battalion of Saxons, who had not done their job properly in the way of laying waste the country, were severely censured and sent to the Yser Canal for three months' punishment.

"We had at first a certain amount of trouble with booby traps, mined cellars and dug-outs, etc., but after a few had gone up we became wary, and eventually inaugurated an excellent game called 'Human Ferrets'—the ferrets being Boche prisoners captured in the neighbourhood, who were put down into suspicious cellars or dug-outs and invited not to return without at least one of their friends' mines. A humorous sapper with the name of Brown was, I believe, the first to think of this excellent method of avoiding casualties and at the same time exercising our happy Huns."

Digitized by Google

When the 8th Division arrived in the north the Battle of Messines had just commenced, and there had been an entirely new organization of the British forces, the Fourth Army (Rawlinson) being now on the extreme left, then the Fifth Army (Gough) on its right in the Ypres area, Plumer's Second Army thence to the south of Armentières, on its right Horne's First Army as far as the south end of Vimy Ridge, while finally Byng's Third Army covered the front about Cambrai.

The Battalion diary records, under date of June 8th, that "during the early hours of the morning our artillery bombardment commenced and the infantry assaulted the German trenches, taking all objectives and repulsing all counter-attacks—north of Ypres, Comines Canal and further south." These were the operations which now endured for some seven weeks, and which led up to the fighting which is known as the Third Battle of Ypres.

Reinforced by nearly one hundred non-commissioned officers and men who had joined during the weeks spent at rest and in training, the Battalion moved on June 11th to Caestre, and found itself there in somewhat poor billets scattered over a very wide area; then next day the Foresters marched on, by way of Godvaersvelde and Reninghelst, to Ouderdom, where they established themselves in a scattered camp, and now formed part of the IInd Corps, commanded by General Jacob; here there was a very careful and complete inspection of gas respirators and gas helmets, in view of the work which was before the Battalion.

There was still another march to be completed before the final destination of the 8th Division was reached, and Ouderdom was left again on the 14th and the Foresters marched to the cavalry barracks at Ypres—the Battalion's first experience of the grim Salient.

On the 21st Lieutenant-Colonel Sherbrooke took over temporary command of the 24th Infantry Brigade from Brigadier-General H. W. Cobham, who was proceeding on leave, and Major T. H. Watson assumed command of the Battalion.

The weather during the greater part of June was fine and warm, and considering that the Battalion was frequently quartered in the town of Ypres, which the enemy persistently shelled, the casualties—10 killed or died of wounds and 53 wounded—cannot be regarded as excessive. During June the following officers joined:—Lieutenants R. N. Eicholtz, W. A. Brewer, M. S. Wakefield and A. C. Walker; Second-Lieutenants J. McM. Robison, W. Greensmith, E. Pattinson, B. M. Kelk, B. H. Baxter and F. R. Hinderlich.

On the afternoon of July 9th the Division left the Ypres salient for a time, moving to a training area at Beaumetz-les-Aires, where the attack was sedulously practised over ground representing as nearly as possible that over which the forthcoming operations were likely to take place, and every opportunity was taken of permitting all ranks to inspect "picture maps" and models of the country beyond Ypres. "The country round here is simply delightful," so writes an officer of the 1st Battalion of our Regiment, "and the change and rest will do everybody a lot of good. We have been inspected by Sir Douglas Haig and by the Corps Commander, Sir Claud Jacob, quite recently, both of whom were good enough to say some nice things about the Battalion. . . . We caused a lot of excitement in the village to-day by

Digitized by Google

borrowing all the washing-tubs and making baths for the Battalion in a field. M. le Maire and other dignitaries attended and were much thrilled—stood and gazed for hours, never having seen anybody have a bath before, I fancy."

All good times must, however, come to an end, and on the morning of the 21st the return journey to the front commenced, the Battalion proceeding by rail, omnibus and march route via St. Hilaire, Abeele, Reninghelst, and Halifax Camp to Halfway House, from which place, on July 31st at 3.50 a.m., the Foresters moved to the attack in artillery formation, leaving Bellewaarde Lake on their right on the way to the forming-up position under cover of the Ridge.

The front of the attack which was to open the Third Battle of Ypres was fifteen miles in length, from the Lys River to a little north of Steenstraate, but the main British effort was to be directed against the seven and a half miles only between Boesinghe and the Zillebeke—Zandvoorde road, carried out by the Fifth Army, under General Sir H. Gough. This Army contained four corps, and these were, reckoning from left to right, the XIVth, the XVIIIth, the XIXth and the IInd, this last containing in similar order, the 8th, 18th, 30th and 24th Divisions. The ten divisions composing these four corps were opposed by thirteen German divisions in line.

The last week of July had been dull and cloudy, and on the 30th there were heavy rain and thunderstorms, the former ceasing at dawn on the 31st, but a thick mist remained and the sky was overcast, while the ground was saturated and spongy. All through the 30th and the night of the 30th—31st the Allied bombardment was sustained, and then at 3.50 a.m. on the 31st the whole Allied front burst into flame, and under cover of thermite and blazing oil, and a very accurate artillery barrage from a great number of guns of all calibres, the infantry went over their parapets and the battle commenced.

In the front line of the 24th Brigade were the 2nd Battalion East Lancashire Regiment and the 1st Battalion Sherwood Foresters on the right and left respectively, while next to the East Lancashires was the 17th Battalion Manchester Regiment, of the 90th Brigade of the 30th Division, the Scottish Rifles, of the 23rd Brigade, being on the left of the Foresters.

The scene of the attack was through Hooge north-eastwards by the large sheet of shallow water known as Bellewaarde Lake and the surrounding marshy land, with the successive ridges there and by Westhoek. It was difficult country, full of swampy patches with clumps of trees and scattered German strongholds having abundant concrete defences. In Hooge itself the resistance offered was unexpectedly light; the houses had been practically flattened out by the British guns, and the Germans did not really hold out in the cellars of the château, which they had spared no pains to strengthen. As a matter of fact our bombardment had driven the greater part of the defenders into the chain of isolated strong points to the east of Bellewaarde Lake and the trenches over Bellewaarde Ridge, and here the Sherwood Foresters, and the Northamptons who supported them, encountered the first serious resistance. But our men were not to be denied, and within an hour of leaving their assembly position the Foresters had cleared Château Wood, had swept over the southern slopes

Digitized by Google

of Bellewaarde Ridge, and had established themselves in the enemy support trench.

From here the ground sloped down to the swamp which surrounded the ruins of several farmhouses, and then rose to Westhoek Ridge, along which ran the Frezenberg Road. An especially strong fortified position lay in front of our 1st Battalion at the cross roads near Westhoek, and this consisted of the ruins of an old estaminet which the enemy had converted into a regular nest of concrete machine gun posts. This was stalked and attacked by our bombers, and when our men finally got possession of it 2 officers and 40 unwounded Germans were sent back to the "cages" in rear. From here the Foresters, passing through the Northamptons, fought their way on, and at last established their line on the crest of Westhoek Ridge. From the trenches here an excellent observation could be maintained over the enemy country beyond. Other troops now came up, and the whole went on and captured Westhoek village.

Parties of Germans could be seen straggling about among the craters in front of Polygon Wood and collecting in the fields beyond Zonnebeeke, evidently trying to collect forces sufficient for a counter-attack; but for the time being they were too thoroughly disorganized to attempt anything of the kind, though the German guns had again become active, shelling Bellewaarde Ridge and the ground lying between the crest and Westhoek. Their barrage increased in volume during the day; early in the afternoon counter-attacks were attempted, and about 3.30 p.m. one of the heaviest of these fell upon the 24th Infantry Brigade, and the Foresters and East Lancashires had some desperate fighting, but held their own and drove back the enemy with heavy loss to Zonnebeeke and Polygon Wood, whence they had come.

"At the end of the day our troops on the Fifth Army front had carried the German first system of defence south of Westhoek . . . they had already gained the whole of the crest of the ridge and had denied the enemy observation over the Ypres plain. Further north they had captured the enemy's second line also as far as St. Julien. North of that village they had passed beyond the German second line, and held the line of the Steenbeek to our junction with the French. . . . Over 6,100 prisoners, including 133 officers, were captured by us in this battle . . . we also captured some 25 guns."*

The weather had been very threatening throughout July 31st, and rain began to fall heavily that afternoon, continuing without intermission for four days; the soil was of such a nature that operations of any magnitude could no longer be pursued, and a resumption of the offensive had to be postponed until a period of dry weather should allow the ground to recover.

By daybreak on August 1st the ground was covered to a depth of two feet with mud and water; men struggling in the swamp found themselves sometimes waist-deep, while the German bombardment continued without intermission; but on the evening of this day the 24th Brigade was relieved by one from the 25th Division, and the Battalion was withdrawn to Steenvoorde.

Writing on August 3rd, Lieutenant-Colonel Sherbrooke said:—"I have just brought the remains of the Battalion out of the curious mixture of undiluted hell and glorious moments that a successful attack combines. We were

* Despatch of December 25th, 1917.

Digitized by Google

amongst the troops who widened the Ypres salient in the great advance, and this Battalion assaulted the three lines of trenches that defended Westhoek, and captured the place, with about 200 prisoners and 19 machine guns. Great work, with plenty of blood and many fine deeds during the five counter-attacks we stood off. Once more I have emerged one of six officers left, and this time with a very trifling wound. Our casualties were less than in our last two shows, and the men's tails are right up. We have just had a good speech from the Divisional Commander, and congratulations to the Brigade and the Battalion are rolling in. . . . The Battalion fought magnificently, and I am extraordinarily proud of them. . . . I have just completed the recommendations sent in to me by the companies, and it is very difficult to write up in cold, short sentences the splendid actions and deeds of individual daring and complete self-sacrifice that I have selected to send on to the Division.

"All I can say is—thank God I live with men like these; it is a great honour to lead men like mine, and I think if I were to meet a conscientious objector to-day I should not be able to keep my hands off him!"

For its services in this action the Battalion was awarded 2 Distinguished Service Orders, 7 Military Crosses, 8 Distinguished Conduct Medals and 19 Military Medals.

The casualties during the same operations amounted to 7 killed or died of wounds, 3 officers and 40 other ranks wounded, and 1 man missing; the wounded officers were Temporary Lieutenant-Colonel R. L. Sherbrooke, Captain R. G. Pearse, and Lieutenant A. S. Giles.

Lieutenant-Colonel Sherbrooke now went on leave in consequence of his wound, and Major Watson again took command of the Battalion.

For ten days or more the Foresters remained in comparative quiet at Steenvoorde, but from the 15th to 18th the Battalion was again engaged in operations which, if not of an especially important character, show the readiness of all to accept responsibility, to act on their own initiative, and to adapt themselves at short notice to the circumstances of the moment.

Soon after midday on the 15th, 200 men of the Battalion proceeded by lorries, under command of Captain Moore, to carry ammunition for the three machine gun companies of the Brigade, joining about midnight the rest of the Battalion in Railway Wood dug-outs. Early next morning, the 16th, 20 men under Lieutenant Abbotts reported themselves as a carrying party for evacuating wounded, while the Battalion remained at Railway Wood and supplied escorts for prisoners, of whom a hundred passed through before noon, at which hour the Battalion, with the 2nd Northamptons, was placed at the disposal of the General Officer Commanding 25th Brigade. Half an hour later the Foresters, less the above-mentioned detachments, and at the time only about 130 strong, moved forward and took over the support line on Bellewaarde Ridge, vacated by the Northampton Regiment, who had gone up to reinforce the front line, which was being strongly attacked. About 4 p.m. the shell fire on Bellewaarde Ridge became more intense, and a heavy enemy barrage was put on Westhoek Ridge.

About 5 p.m. statements were received from wounded and stragglers that the enemy had broken through and was attacking Westhoek from the front

Digitized by Google

and right. The men of an aid post also arrived saying that they had been forced to evacuate their aid post at Westhoek owing to the advance of the enemy, who was attacking in strong force. Second-Lieutenant Weston, one of the officers with the party carrying the wounded, having heard these rumours, dumped the wounded behind the ridge, and leaving them in charge of Royal Army Medical Corps orderlies, rejoined his unit at the double with about 40 men. The Commanding Officer made a hurried inspection of the defensive line on the Ridge, all Lewis guns were laid ready for action, one trained Lewis gunner being available for each gun. All men found in the vicinity, regardless of their unit and including the slightly wounded on their way to the A.D.S., were pushed into the defensive line, which was now thoroughly organized with 16 Lewis guns and 250 men, about 170 of whom were Sherwood Foresters, on a front of about 500 yards. The order was passed along that the position was to be held to the last man.

No attack was, however, made by the enemy, who was kept to the east of Westhoek by our artillery barrage, and about 6 p.m. the hostile shelling decreased in intensity; about 9.30 the Battalion moved forward to the front line to relieve the 3rd Rifle Brigade, and during the night a trench was dug and a patrol was sent out to establish communication with the 2nd East Lancashires on the left, whose position was occupied when the line was taken over. Connection was established by a line of shell holes extending for about 120 yards. From dawn onwards considerable movement was observed in the enemy's line, and German sniping was very active, so, to control this latter, snipers' posts were established about every 200 yards along the trench, with the result that by noon movement and sniping had almost entirely ceased, and our men were able to move about and some small reinforcement to come up from the rear without loss.

In the course of the afternoon the party of 50 men under Lieutenant Greensmith, who had been carrying for the 23rd Machine Gun Company, rejoined the Battalion, and later the party under Lieutenant Abbotts, who had been attached to the Royal Army Medical Corps, also rejoined. During the night the consolidation of the position was completed, the line of outposts in shell-holes extending to the battalion on the left was connected up by a trench, and outposts in shell-holes were put out some fifty yards to the front. On the 18th the Foresters were relieved, and moved back by platoons to the Halifax Camp area.

During the rest of the month the Battalion had several moves, first for some days to San Sylvestre Capelle, thence to Romarin Camp, where it relieved some of the Australian troops about Ploegsteert Wood, and then, on the 31st, taking the place of the 50th Australian Battalion in the sector due west of Warneton—two companies in the front line and two in support, with the 2nd Battalion Worcestershire Regiment on the right and the 17th Manchesters, of the 30th Division, on the left.

The 8th Division was now in the VIIIth Corps, under General Sir A. Hunter-Weston. During August the following officers joined the Battalion: Second-Lieutenants C. E. Wardle, G. Stamper, A. A. Dean, G. S. Dexter—

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

who was wounded the very day of his arrival—J. T. Siddons, A. Killer, C. W. Daniels, E. Turner, W. B. Longson, B. Middleton and W. E. Barnes.

During nearly the whole of September the Battalion rested by day in various camps and provided working parties by night; there were the usual inspections by high authorities—the Corps and Divisional Commanders, "both of whom," writes the Commanding Officer with pardonable pride, "said all the usual nice things and a good many more besides, and while the Corps Commander said he was going to write to General Marshall to tell him the old First Battalion was as good as it was in 1914, General Heneker said what pleased me even more—that since he had taken over the 8th Division he had never had to give a moment's thought or care to this Battalion, and that we had rendered very good service to him and to the Division. . . . Finally, and to cap the record of our glories, we annexed fifty per cent. of the prizes won by the Brigade in the Divisional Horse Show, being easily first in the Division, collected seventy-five per cent. of the prizes in the Brigade Sports, and won for the second time the Brigade Football Championship!"

On September 22nd the Battalion was moved to the Bailleul training area, and by the end of the month was again up in the line, where the enemy shelling was very heavy, especially at night, falling particularly upon the reserve trenches and the Douve Valley; the casualties were, however, comparatively trifling during this month, amounting to 23 only, and but one of these was fatal, a man dying of gas poisoning. That the losses in September were few was fortunate, since the reinforcements in "other ranks" amounted to no more than 30, while 6 young officers joined the service companies in the same period—Second-Lieutenants W. L. Green, G. V. Marriott, A. Gamble, C. Harrison, T. Mason and C. F. Cox.

On October 18th the Battalion was attached for a period of some ten days to the 2nd Australian Corps, and went up to Ypres for the third time to help in constructing a light railway, with five other specially selected battalions, immediately behind the new front line near Poelcapelle, the work being performed under continuous fire, and, being urgently needed, only fighting units were employed, and though the casualties in the Battalion were surprisingly small "it was not much fun at first," as one of the workers casually remarks; but on October 29th the Foresters were relieved, and were sent back in lorries to Romarin Camp.

On this day the Commanding Officer wrote home:—"I grieve to say we have lost our doctor, after two years; his name is Orr, and he is middle-aged, a Scotsman, and quite one of the bravest men I know. He has gone to the Navy. In his place we have got another Scotsman, quite a boy and a most enormous person, just out from Edinburgh University, and weighing about fifteen stone. The Quartermaster took him for what was meant to be a quiet ride through Ypres his first morning, but they ran into a nasty bit of shelling by the Cloth Hall. The Quartermaster shouted to him to jump off and get down into a cellar, but as the doctor said afterwards, 'I couldna' tak' the horse, too, so I just bided a wee and then galloped for't.' What he apparently did was to jump the remains of a motor lorry and a wire fence, and then retire with his

Digitized by Google

horse into the half-empty moat, from which they emerged safe, if rather damp, when things had quieted down."

The month of November had hardly opened and the Battalion was up in the line, when several officers of the American Army, now arriving in Europe, were attached to the 8th Division, and two of these, Lieutenants Hutchings and Pullen, reported their arrival at Battalion headquarters and were posted for duty to "B" Company. On the 17th the Foresters moved by rail and road to Brandhoek, and thence on the 19th to Wieltje, going up almost immediately from there to the front line as supporting battalion in the sector just north of Passchendaele. On the following day the Battalion was holding the line and was subjected to very heavy shelling, the casualties, mainly in "B" and "D" Companies, being not far short of 90, while Lieutenant Wakefield was killed on this day and another subaltern, Lieutenant Brewer, on the 21st. Theoretically the Battle of Ypres was over some ten days or more, but fighting and death did not sensibly diminish.

The shell-swept battlefield was deep in mud, and it was almost impossible to dig trenches. The Battalion transport had a bad time—the only way to the front was by a wooden causeway laid on the mud, and after dark this was kept under enemy fire. There were several casualties among transport men and animals bringing up rations and ammunition by night, and the greatest credit is due to Captain J. B. Mudge, the transport officer, his staff and personnel.

On November 24th the Sherwood Foresters moved back into divisional support at St. Jean, but, on the afternoon of the last day of the month, entrained at Brandhoek for Wizernes. From here, on Christmas Day, the Battalion went back again to St. Jean, and the end of 1917 found it in Red Rose Camp in divisional reserve.

Digitized by Google

Maps 4 and 2

CHAPTER V

JANUARY TO JUNE, 1918.

VILLERS BRETONNEUX AND THE CHEMIN DES DAMES

Battle Honours:
"Rosières," "Villers Bretonneux," "Aisne."

THERE is not much of importance to chronicle as to the doings of the 1st Battalion of our Regiment during at least the first two months of the year 1918. For that time the Foresters remained very much in the same area as that of which they had been in occupation during the latter part of the previous year —generally in the Steenvoorde and Poperinghe districts, taking their share of duty up the line, and during their periods of rest being held in brigade or divisional reserve in various camps.

There was a general feeling that the war could not continue very much longer, and that it would end in favour of the Western Powers, for it was noticeable that the German resistance was weakening, though upon occasion German soldiers fought as well as they had ever done. But while in almost every theatre of war, except on the western front, the Allies had gained many and remarkable successes, and though Germany was daily feeling more and more the effects of British sea-power, there were certain influences at work which caused Germany to hold on, to encourage her allies to stand fast, and to give her grounds for hope that the end was not yet in sight. Russia by this had completely broken down, and that country had been over-run by the enemy, while Roumania, which had come into the war on the side of the Western Powers, had found she had not only to meet foes in front but treacherous friends on her flank, and had been compelled to make terms with Germany, so that our chief enemy was at liberty during the winter of 1917—1918 to transfer many divisions from the Russian and Roumanian frontiers to France and Flanders. In this extremity several of the divisions which had been taken from the armies of the two chief Western Powers to stiffen the Italian line after the disaster of Caporetto, had been hurriedly recalled to France, despite the fact that a great Austrian Force was confronting the Italians on the Piave.

Then for some considerable time past the heavy drain on the manhood of the British nation had been a source of no inconsiderable anxiety, equally to those who had to find men for our armies in their many and divergent theatres of war, and to those who had to train and prepare them for the work demanded of them; and the decision had, with some regret, been come to by the responsible military authorities to carry out a very drastic reorganization of the divisions of the British Army in France. This measure was completed during the month of February, 1918, when the number of battalions in each division was reduced

Digitized by Google

from thirteen to ten, and those in each brigade from four to three. As a result of this rearrangement the 2nd Battalion East Lancashire Regiment was now transferred from the 24th Infantry Brigade, which thenceforth consisted of the 1st Battalion Worcestershire Regiment, the 1st Battalion Sherwood Foresters, and the 2nd Battalion Northamptonshire Regiment.

"This measure, which was the consequence of the failure of the Government to provide the drafts, caused a drastic change in the organization and tactics of our infantry at a critical period when there was no time to accustom commanders and troops to the new conditions. . . . Nor was this all. Owing to the decline of the strength of the French Army the French Government became more and more insistent that we should take over a longer stretch of the front. . . . After prolonged negotiations between the two governments . . . the French arguments prevailed, and Haig, in order to meet the wishes of the British Government, agreed with Pétain to take over an additional twenty-eight miles of front, and to extend his front south of the Somme as far as the Oise. This extension made the length of our line 130 miles, the greatest length of front we had ever held, while the number of rifles to hold it was approximately equal to that in March, 1916, when the length of our front was eighty miles and the Germans still had great armies on the Russian front."*

"Towards the middle of February, 1918," wrote Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig,† "it became evident that the enemy was preparing for a big offensive on the Western Front. It was known from various sources that he had been steadily increasing his forces in the Western theatre since the beginning of November, 1917. In three and a half months 28 infantry divisions had been transferred from the Eastern theatre and 6 infantry divisions from the Italian theatre. There were reports that further reinforcements were on their way to the West, and it was also known that the enemy had greatly increased his heavy artillery in the Western theatre during the same period. These reinforcements were more than were necessary for defence, and, as they were moved at a time when the distribution of food and fuel to the civil population in Germany was rendered extremely difficult through lack of rolling stock, I concluded that the enemy intended to attack at an early date."

By the end of February German activities had become especially marked opposite the front held by the Fifth Army (General Gough) extending from south of Barisis to north of Gouzeaucourt, a distance of forty-two miles, and that occupied by the Third Army (General Byng) from north of Gouzeaucourt to south of Gavrelle, a stretch of twenty-seven miles. The Third Army disposed of 15 infantry divisions, the Fifth of 14 with 3 cavalry divisions.

Early on the morning of March 21st the enemy attack opened with great intensity against the front of the Third and Fifth Armies from the Oise to the Scarpe, but the main assaults were directed against the Fifth Army, and so great was the pressure that early on the morning of the 23rd General Gough was obliged to give orders for his troops to fall back first to the line of the Somme, and later in rear of it.

"The loss of the line of the Somme was a very serious matter, for the

* Maurice, *The Last Four Months*, pages 22—24.
† Despatch of July 20th, 1918.

Digitized by Google

Germans now entered upon the zone in which were placed our depots, stores and hospitals. These had all to be abandoned or evacuated hastily, and consequently great quantities of war material of all kinds fell into the enemy's hands; much suffering was caused to the sick and wounded, of whom numbers had to be left unattended and without shelter alongside the railway lines in the rear until the hospital trains could pick them up; the telegraph and telephone communications were disorganized, and the difficulties of organizing defence increased as the danger grew."*

It was at this crisis that the 8th Division was hurriedly brought down from the Flanders country to the Somme, and with other reinforcements, both British and French, was flung across the path of the German advance to do what men could to stem the tide of invasion.

The 1st Battalion of the Sherwood Foresters was now commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Watson, originally of the Worcestershire Regiment, who had been second-in-command to Lieutenant-Colonel Sherbrooke for the preceding nine months, and who had taken that officer's place on his being appointed to command the 8th Battalion Machine Gun Corps. This record of the work of the Battalion from March to May, 1918, has suffered irreparably from the death in action of this very gallant officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Watson, and of that of his successor in command, Major Moore.

The Battalion had been engaged in training at Dudasrues since March 13th, when, at 6 p.m. on the 21st, orders were received to move at 3 next morning to St. Omer, and there entrain for Nesle. On arrival here at 8.30 p.m. on the 22nd the Battalion was warned of the proximity of the enemy and marched off at once, with advance and flank guards, towards Athies where, as at present arranged, it was to go into camp. While on the march, however, fresh instructions were received directing that the Foresters were to dig in on a position on the west bank of the Somme, the left resting on St. Christ and the right some 2,500 yards south of that place. The 8th Division, as a matter of fact, was allotted a frontage of something like 16,000 yards and told to stay there!

On the 23rd the 2nd Devons came up on the left and the 2nd Northamptons on the right of our Battalion, while about midday the 23rd Division, which had been holding the line in front, came through the three above-mentioned battalions and took up a position in support, and the front being now clear of our troops, the Engineers made three separate attempts to destroy the bridge at St. Christ, but it still remained passable. During the night of the 23rd—24th the enemy came to close quarters and made determined attempts to cross the bridge; on one occasion he gained a temporary footing, but was at once counter-attacked by two platoons of "A" and "B" Companies of the Foresters and hurled back, leaving a number of killed and wounded in our hands. It was at this time that the commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Watson, was unhappily killed by a machine gun bullet while personally leading the counter-attack.

On the morning of the 24th the enemy again made an attempt to cross, but was driven off before he set foot on the bridge; in the evening, however, about

* Maurice, page 42.

Digitized by Google

6 o'clock, the enemy succeeded in crossing the river on the right of the 8th Division and at its junction with the 20th about Epargny, and the right of the 8th had to be retired west of Morchain, while the German infantry worked their way up towards the right posts of the Battalion, which managed to keep them at bay with rifle and Lewis gun fire. During the night of the 24th—25th the attackers tried repeatedly to gain the ruins of the bridge at St. Christ and cross the Somme, and some at least of these attempts were successful, but those Germans who did succeed in setting foot upon the further bank did not return thence—all were killed, wounded, drowned or captured. On the morning of the 25th "D" Company, on the right of the position held by the Foresters, recaptured two of our posts, killed many of the enemy, and held them inactive for the rest of the day.

March 25th was a day of very real anxiety to General Watts, commanding the XIXth Corps, with which the 8th Division was now fighting; the enemy was pressing hard, many of our units were greatly exhausted, the line was in places worn very thin, and any real fracture would have produced an almost desperate situation; and at 4.15 p.m. General Watts issued orders for withdrawal to a second position further to the west, while holding the line of the Somme as the left flank. "During these operations," an historian tells us, "the 8th Division had performed the remarkable feat of holding back and defeating 14 separate German divisions during 36 hours on a 9-mile front, and finally withdrew in perfect order."

Our 1st Battalion hung on to its ground until partially surrounded and with the enemy between it and the new defensive line which the Division had taken up, when at last orders arrived to withdraw, and then, led by Lieutenant-Colonel Moore and taking all their wounded with them, the Foresters charged through the enemy in their rear to their brigade, where they were received with open arms as men who had been reported surrounded and captured. "They came back," we are told, "with their tails straight up over their heads, but alas! with only half the number of effectives they started with." At Misery the Battalion was reorganized, and then marched in artillery formation back to Ertrées, where, provisionally, it came under the orders of and took up a line with the 23rd Infantry Brigade.

At 4 a.m. on the 26th the Foresters were ordered to rejoin their own brigade at Vermandovillers, where they rested for a couple of hours and were then directed to form part of the 25th Infantry Brigade at Lihons, and take up a line east of the Lihons—Méharicourt road, remaining here until 5 p.m., when they were ordered to withdraw to Rosières as supporting battalion to the 24th Brigade. Here, at Rosières, they passed the night of the 26th—27th in billets.

On this day, the 26th, an event of far-reaching importance took place, the Allied Governments deciding to place the supreme control of the operations of the French and British Armies in France and Belgium in the hands of General Foch, who accordingly assumed command.

It must, too, have been on this day that the following gracious and inspiring message from their King reached some at least of his soldiers in France:—

"*I can assure you that the fortitude, courage and self-sacrifice with which the troops under your command are so heroically resisting greatly superior*

Digitized by Google

numbers is realized by me and my people. The Empire stands calm and confident in its soldiers. May God bless and give them strength in their time of trial."

On the early morning of March 27th the 1st Battalion Sherwood Foresters took up a position in support of the front line in advance of Vrély, and about 2 p.m. the enemy having here heavily attacked the 8th Division, the Battalion was ordered hurriedly forward to join in a very successful counter-attack, whereby the enemy was forced back and many prisoners were taken, when the Battalion retired again and took up with the 23rd Brigade a line east of Harbonnières, where it was relieved that night by the 50th Division. Next morning, the 28th, a position was first moved to west of Vrély along the sunken road—then, some three hours later, a fresh line was taken up just south of Caix. But there was to be no rest or respite, for the advancing enemy here pushed both flanks back, while the Foresters held on like grim death to the ground allotted to them, until ordered about 5.30 p.m. back to Moreuil, where they joined the remainder of the 24th Brigade and marched to Jumel, arriving there shortly after midnight. Here the next two days were spent at rest; on the evening of the 30th the Battalion marched to Castel, and thence the same evening to take up a position in the front line running east and west from the river Avre, just north of Moreuil, relieving here the 4th Hussars and the Fort Garry Horse.

During these days of storm and strain the losses had been very heavy, amounting to 3 officers and 27 other ranks killed, 6 officers and 90 men wounded, and 3 officers and 259 non-commissioned officers and men missing, of the latter of whom by far the greater proportion may equally be reckoned among the killed and wounded. The officers killed were: Lieutenant-Colonel T. H. Watson, M.C., Second-Lieutenants C. F. Cox and G. Stamper; wounded were Second-Lieutenants L. F. Buxton, C. E. Cumberland, W. L. Green, A. Killer, C. E. Wardle and J. R. Wardle; while the following are the names of the missing officers: Second-Lieutenants W. Greensmith, R. W. Rounds, M.C. (also wounded), and J. T. Siddons.

During the first three weeks of April the Battalion was out of the front line; at first at Moreuil, where it was relieved on the morning of the 3rd by the 133rd French Division, going into billets at Dommartin, and proceeding next day by way of Sains-en-Amienois to Hangest-sur-Somme, where several days were spent in billets reorganizing the companies, and where, on the 9th, Major-General Heneker, commanding the Division, inspected the Foresters and congratulated the Battalion on "the magnificent work" it had done in checking the hostile advance and in the counter-attacks delivered, special reference being made to "the splendid resistance" offered by the Battalion on the canal bank. The General Officer Commanding the Division stated that the breaking of the enemy offensive was largely due, in the first instance, to the stand made by the Battalion at the canal.

On April 12th the Battalion proceeded via St. Roche to Querrieu, remained here a few days in corps reserve, and then moved on the 18th to Blangy Tronville, going up on the following day to relieve in the front line the 8th Londons, of the 58th Division, about Villers Bretonneux, where "C" Company

Digitized by Google

immediately made their presence known by the capture of two German prisoners.

Before the 1st Battalion of our Regiment is called to occupy its place again in the battle line, it may be as well to look round and take stock of the general situation.

The retreat of the British armies from the Somme had come to an end with the close of the first week in April, the Allied front had been re-established and Amiens was, for the moment at least, tolerably secure, though the enemy was still holding certain dominating positions whence, when he was ready, he could renew the attack; and while his losses in the recent fighting had been very heavy, he had now in the West a great preponderance of strength. The first blow had been struck and had been parried, but others were about to fall, and the Allied front was by no means secure. The knowledge of all that the nation, and its steadfast men at the front, had recently passed through, caused all workers in the United Kingdom to close their ranks and to put forward an increased output of men, guns and stores. Early in April a Bill was passed raising the limit of military age to fifty, abolishing exemptions and giving power to extend conscription to Ireland. Troops were brought from Palestine and Salonica to France, while within the course of a very few weeks 335,000 men were sent across the Channel—half of which number, if available on the Western front before the opening of the great German offensive, would have sufficed to break it at the start.

The enemy's offensive on the Somme front had come temporarily to an end with the failure of his attacks of April 4th and 5th, but the possibility of a fresh German offensive north of the La Bassée Canal had not been overlooked by the commander of the British forces. To meet the urgent demands of the Somme battle, Sir Douglas Haig had been obliged to withdraw ten divisions from the northern portion of his line, replacing them by those weakened or exhausted in the battle in the south. The advantages of a successful German offensive in the north were very evident, since it would threaten the Channel ports and, consequently, the British communications; in an ordinary or normal spring the ground in this area was so marshy and intersected by dykes and canals that an advance over it in force would have presented very serious difficulties, but the spring of 1918 had been unusually dry, and the ground was hard and by no means unfavourable. The new German offensive measures then aimed at an attack between La Bassée and Armentières, when the threat to Calais, Boulogne, and other seaports would draw reinforcements from south again to north, and then, when the southern front had been weakened, it was hoped by the enemy again to make a fresh and final thrust at Amiens.

The German attack upon the British front in Flanders broke on the morning of April 9th, and formed the commencement of the operations known as the Battle of the Lys, which endured until the 29th; local attacks, meanwhile, had taken place from time to time on both sides of the Somme battle front, while on April 23rd a more serious attack, in which four German divisions were employed against the British forces, took place on the Allied front between the Somme and the Avre valleys, in the area of Villers Bretonneux held by General Butler's IIIrd Corps, now containing the 8th and 58th Divisions. Villers Bretonneux

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

is a small town standing on a curve of the downs from which a commanding view is obtained of Amiens, to which city it is something of the nature of a gateway.

The situation at the opening of the Flanders offensive had been fraught with extreme peril, causing the Field-Marshal to issue the famous order in which he said :—

" Three weeks ago to-day the enemy began his terrific attacks against us on a 50-mile front. His objects are to separate us from the French, to take the Channel ports and destroy the British Army.

" In spite of throwing already 106 divisions into the battle and enduring the most reckless sacrifice of human life, he has as yet made little progress towards his goals.

" We owe this to the determined fighting and self-sacrifice of our troops. Words fail me to express the admiration which I feel for the splendid resistance offered by all ranks of our Army under the most trying circumstances.

" Many amongst us are now tired. To those I would say that victory will belong to the side which holds out the longest. The French Army is moving rapidly and in great force to our support.

" There is no other course open to us but to fight it out. Every position must be held to the last man; there must be no retirement. With our backs to the wall and believing in the justice of our cause, each one of us must fight on to the end. The safety of our homes and the freedom of mankind alike depend upon the conduct of each one of us at this critical moment."

Between April 19th and 21st the 8th Division took over the front line astride the main Amiens—Faucoucourt road, relieving the 174th Brigade of the 58th Division in the right sector, and the 14th Brigade of the 5th Australian Division in the left sector. The 21st passed quietly, the British artillery carrying out an intense and harassing fire on the enemy front during the night of the 21st—22nd, and next day a prisoner taken from the 4th Guard Division of the German Army stated that the town of Villers Bretonneux was shortly to be attacked. Nothing of importance, however, transpired, except for hostile shelling with gas shells and high explosive of Villers Bretonneux and the western portion of the Bois l'Abbé, while fresh captures reported that the attack on Villers Bretonneux would probably be made on the morning of the 24th.

During the night of the 23rd—24th, the 24th Brigade was relieved in the right sector by the 23rd, and the Battalion marched back to billets in Blangy Tronville.

At 3.45 on the morning of the 24th a very heavy enemy bombardment by gas and high explosive opened, directed mostly against our front system, Villers Bretonneux and Cachy Switch, when orders were given for the brigade in reserve to man the reserve line system. The enemy bombardment slackened about 6.30, when smoke was sent by the enemy along the front of the Division, and this and the mist prevented our men in the front line from seeing more than some twenty yards to their front; but by this time orders had been received for our Battalion to move up again, and by 4 o'clock it had reached Blangy Wood. At 7 the German attack opened on the front from 800 yards north of the main Villers Bretonneux—Warfusée road to the southern divisional boundary, and

Digitized by Google

thence southwards, hostile tanks suddenly appearing through the smoke and fog and overrunning the front line of the 23rd Infantry Brigade; the tanks were not very closely followed by the infantry, but moved up and down the British trenches, destroying the defenders and preparing the way for the enemy infantry attack.

At 9.30 a.m. the following was issued from Divisional Headquarters:—

"Enemy has penetrated the western outskirts of Villers Bretonneux. The 23rd Infantry Brigade will counter-attack at once with reserve battalion against western outskirts of Villers Bretonneux. . . . Two tanks are moving to attack in an easterly direction. . . . The reserve battalion of the 24th Brigade (1st Battalion Sherwood Foresters) is placed forthwith at disposal of 23rd Brigade for protection of the right flank about Cachy and Cachy Switch. The 24th Brigade, less 1st Battalion Sherwood Foresters and 22nd Durham L.I., will hold the reserve line under G.O.C. 24th Brigade."

(It is to be noted that the 1st Battalion Sherwood Foresters had originally been allotted to the 23rd Brigade for protection of the right flank in Cachy Switch, but as the 2nd Devons were holding this locality, permission was asked by the General Officer Commanding 23rd Brigade to utilize our Battalion for a counter-attack; this was granted, and the Foresters received at 10 a.m. orders to attack Villers Bretonneux, and, moving forward, met the enemy in the Bois l'Abbé, where a line was taken up.)

The divisional narrative states that "the counter-attack of the 1st Sherwood Foresters did not achieve its object. The Battalion moved in artillery formation along the southern edge of the wood until they arrived at about 12.30 p.m. at U.4.a.1.9., when they moved north into the wood and encountered the enemy in some strength, driving him towards the eastern edge of the wood. At this time the Commanding Officer was wounded, as a result of which correct orders were not issued to the Battalion, which withdrew and commenced to dig in on the road running through U.33.C.—U.33.a. and O.27.d. While digging in here it came under a very heavy 5.9in. barrage and suffered severely. . . ."

The situation remained tolerably stationary during the afternoon, the Germans being unable to get forward in face of our artillery, machine gun and rifle fire; and during the whole of the 25th the Battalion remained holding the line in the Bois l'Abbé as divisional reserve, the 1st Worcesters being on their right; but portions of the Battalion joined the 2nd Middlesex and 2nd West Yorkshire Regiments in finally clearing the Bois d'Aquenne, capturing there 1 officer and 73 other ranks, with many machine guns and mortars.

On the 26th the Battalion extended its line in the Bois l'Abbé to the right about 500 yards, and it had been intended that night to withdraw the Foresters; but later in the day they were informed they must be prepared, with the 1st Worcesters, to attack and capture Monument Wood that night, but later again these attack orders were cancelled by reason of the very weak state, through losses incurred, of both battalions.

Villers Bretonneux was ultimately recaptured, and the Germans driven from all their positions, by the 8th Division and the Australians of the Vth Corps. The divisions which took part in these operations—important as marking the high-water-mark of the German advance in the Somme valley—had

Digitized by Google

incurred some 9,000 casualties, and in the case of the 1st Battalion Sherwood Foresters these amounted, during this brief period, to 3 officers and 36 non-commissioned officers and men killed, 4 officers and 176 other ranks wounded, and 15 men missing—a total of 234 all ranks. The officers killed were Lieutenant R. A. Johnson, Second-Lieutenants T. H. Emblem, M.C., and G. V. Marriott, while the wounded were Second-Lieutenants F. R. Clulow, A. A. Dean, T. P. O'Hare and E. G. Smith.

On the night of the 27th the Battalion was relieved by the 58th Australian Regiment, and marched back to Blangy Wood, moving next day to billets at Camon.

"At the end of April and early in May, the 8th, 21st, 25th and 50th Divisions, subsequently reinforced by the 19th Division and constituting the IXth British Corps, under command of Lieutenant-General Sir A. Hamilton-Gordon, had been placed at Marshal Foch's disposal. These divisions had been despatched by him to the French Sixth Army, to take the place of certain French divisions concentrated behind Amiens. Of these divisions the 19th, 21st, 25th and 50th had taken part in both the Somme battle and the battle of the Lys. The 8th Division had been involved south of the Somme in some of the heaviest fighting of the year, and had behaved with distinguished gallantry. All these divisions had but lately been filled up with young drafts, and, despite their high spirit and gallant record, were in no condition to take part in major operations until they had had several days' rest. During the first fortnight in May three of these divisions—21st, 8th and 50th—were put into line on a front of about fifteen miles between Bermicourt and Bouconville, north of Rheims."*

This particular section of the front had been described by Marshal Foch as "a quiet place on the Aisne," doubtless because he was convinced, from what he was told by his subordinates on the spot, that the position of the Chemin des Dames was impregnable, but equally because he was persuaded that the Germans, if they attacked again, would do so between Montdidier and Arras.

It was on May Day that the General Officer Commanding 24th Brigade issued orders for a move back to a "rest area" on the day following, when the Battalion marched early to Clairy-Saulchoix, and having there received a reinforcing draft 200 strong, proceeded by march route and rail via Saleux, Fismes, Chery Chartreuve and Chery to Magneux, arriving in rather crowded billets at noon on May 9th. From here the commanding officer and company commanders next day reconnoitred the line which was to be taken over between Juvincourt and Berry-au-Bac from the 4th Battalion 221st French Infantry Regiment, and on the 11th the Battalion effected the arranged relief, the Brigade being thus distributed: 1st Worcesters in front line, Sherwood Foresters in support, and the 2nd Northamptons in reserve at Bouvancourt.

Here the troops remained the greater part of a fortnight, the ordinary reliefs being carried out among the three battalions composing the Brigade, and undergoing a certain amount of enemy shelling.

"The position known as the Chemin des Dames," says a military writer,† "formed by the watershed between the Aisne and the Ailette rivers from

* Despatch of December 21st, 1918.
† Major T. E. Compton in the "R.U.S.I. Journal" for August, 1922.

Digitized by Google

Craonne westwards to the Soissons—Laon road, has been at intervals the scene of momentous military action from the time of Cæsar to that of Marshal Foch. In 1814, nearly a hundred years before the outbreak of the recent world war, Napoleon and Blücher manœuvred against each other over this very ground. Meisonnier's picture '1814' in all probability represents the great Emperor's march towards Laon along the Chemin des Dames on March 8th after the battle of Craonne. There had been a heavy fall of snow during the night of the 7th—8th. That part of the plateau lying to the east of Hurtebise Farm (where there is a monument to Marshal Ney) is not actually traversed by the Chemin des Dames. It is, nevertheless, part and parcel of the position which from Craonne to the Soissons—Laon road measures over 15 miles. . . . Against an attack in grand style the Chemin des Dames was not only a bad position, as too narrow, but it was in the front line. . . . Purely tactical considerations pointed to its occupation by a line of outposts, strong only in machine guns, the first real position of resistance being organized on the heights on the left, or south, bank of the Aisne. . . . After serious deliberation, General Pétain had felt himself obliged to approve of the retention of the Chemin des Dames as a position of resistance, with this proviso, however, that none of the divisions of the Sixth Army were to be brought north of the Aisne."

The ridge was held by four divisions in line of the XIth Corps of the Sixth French Army, while on their right was the 50th British Division, on its right the 8th about Juvincourt, the 21st about Neufchatel, with the 25th Division in reserve on the left wing at Craonnelle. The front, of about 24,000 yards, held by the IXth British Corps, ran along the high ground about four miles north of the Aisne for the first 16,000 yards, gradually bending back south-east on its right to Berry-au-Bac, where the line crossed the river and continued on south-east in the direction of Rheims for another 8,000 yards.

The disposition of the British corps is given in more detail by its commander, who writes:* "On the morning of May 26th the troops of, and attached to, the IXth Corps were disposed as follows: 21st Division, holding 7,500 yards of the front line from near the village of Loivre (held by the 45th French Division) to Berry-au-Bac on the Aisne, with headquarters at Chalons-le-Vengeur; 8th Division, holding the next 10,000 yards round Cæsar's Camp and up to a point about half way between Juvincourt and Corberry, with headquarters at Roucy; 50th Division, another 8,000 yards to the source of the river Ailette, where they joined hands with the 22nd French Division in the wooded valley lying north of the narrow steep-sided Craonnelle plateau forming the eastern end of the famous Chemin des Dames. The 50th Division had their headquarters at Beaurieux. Each of the divisions held the front line with all three of its brigades."

The war diary of the 1st Battalion Sherwood Foresters contains very little information of value, which is hardly matter for surprise considering their losses in the action; the account, then, of what happened during the critical days that followed is built up from the accounts of the brigade and corps commanders.

During the afternoon of the 26th the Brigade was warned by telegram from the Division that a prisoner had stated that the enemy intended to attack the

*Lieut.-General Sir A. Hamilton-Gordon in *Sir Douglas Haig's Command*, vol. 2, page 236.

Digitized by Google

Chemin des Dames and the IXth Corps front on the morning of the next day, and that this would be preceded by a bombardment of two or three hours commencing at 1 a.m. Battalion commanders were warned, troops were ordered to be in their battle positions by 7 p.m., and instructions were issued for the maintenance of strong officer patrols along the whole front until daylight. About 11 p.m. a very bright light suddenly sprang up in the direction of Amifontaine, upon which the British guns opened a heavy counter-preparation fire, designed to harass the assembly of the enemy's troops and to introduce as much confusion and difficulty as possible into his preliminary movements. This fire continued until nearly 1 o'clock in the morning of the 27th, and, upon it ceasing, the enemy opened an intense bombardment of our trench system and the area in rear, carried out for the most part by heavy trench mortars, but gas was also projected on the second system and back areas. Tanks do not appear to have at any time been used on the front of the 24th Brigade.

The first signal observed on the divisional front was the S.O.S. signal sent up by the left battalion of the 25th Brigade at 3.50 a.m. It was not repeated in rear, but five minutes later it was sent up simultaneously by the left and right battalions of the 25th Brigade and repeated by brigade headquarters. A few seconds later it was repeated by the right company of the 23rd Brigade. Five minutes later again it was sent up by both battalions of the 23rd Brigade, both battalions of the 25th Brigade, and by both headquarters.

It will be seen from the above that the 24th Brigade was in reserve at the outset, in contradiction of General Hamilton-Gordon's account, while the Battalion, which had been in reserve billets on the 25th, moved up to Roucy during the afternoon of the 26th.

About 4 a.m. on the 27th an officer's patrol returned from the front of the 8th Division line and reported that there was no sign of any enemy infantry activity, and that the German bombardment had in no way damaged the British wire. Half an hour later the enemy infantry, who had been massed with successful secrecy in the front, left their trenches, and at 5 a.m. the intelligence officer of one of the front line battalions arrived at brigade headquarters stating that when he left his battalion headquarters it was surrounded by Germans.

By this our 1st Battalion had been ordered up to and had reached the Aisne line.

On the information brought by the intelligence officer above mentioned, the S.O.S. signal was sent up twice from 24th Brigade Headquarters although no such signal had been sent up from the front line, but two white lights were seen from our lines at 5.15 from the direction of Mason O.P., and the light now improving, enemy aeroplanes were noticed flying low over our forward system and firing into our trenches. At 5.45 a.m. large numbers of the enemy were seen to be approaching along the line of the Miette and from the Bois de Bosche, while they appeared to be assembling and reorganizing in our trenches along the line, Route 44; officers were plainly visible walking up and down the parapet organizing their men, who then advanced in small parties of six in file across the open, making no use of the communication trenches.

By this time the Battalion would seem to have become involved in a fighting retirement to Montagne de Guyencourt, the details, under Second-Lieutenant

Digitized by Google

Greaves, had been ordered up to Ventelay, while the transport had moved from Ventelay to the wood south of Montigny, and later to Vendeuil. "The 8th Division," writes General Hamilton-Gordon, "were eventually forced off the high ground south of Juvincourt, down the valley of the Miette and off the ridge which separates that stream from the Aisne. The right brigade was, indeed, forced across the Aisne, blowing up the bridges behind it. The centre and left brigades were still north of the river, yielding ground inch by inch with such determination that one battalion, the 2nd Devons, was exterminated almost to a man."

At about 9 a.m. all men of the 24th Brigade who could be collected—3 officers and 69 non-commissioned officers and men—were ordered to hold a trench on the north-east side of Roucy. This party was under the command of Captain Worster, 1st Worcesters, and was in touch with a battalion of the 25th Brigade on the right and a party of the 23rd Brigade on the left. They held this line until about 5 p.m., suffering heavy casualties from field guns firing at them over open sights from the left bank of the Aisne, when they withdrew, in conjunction with troops on either flank, to the high ground about Roucy.

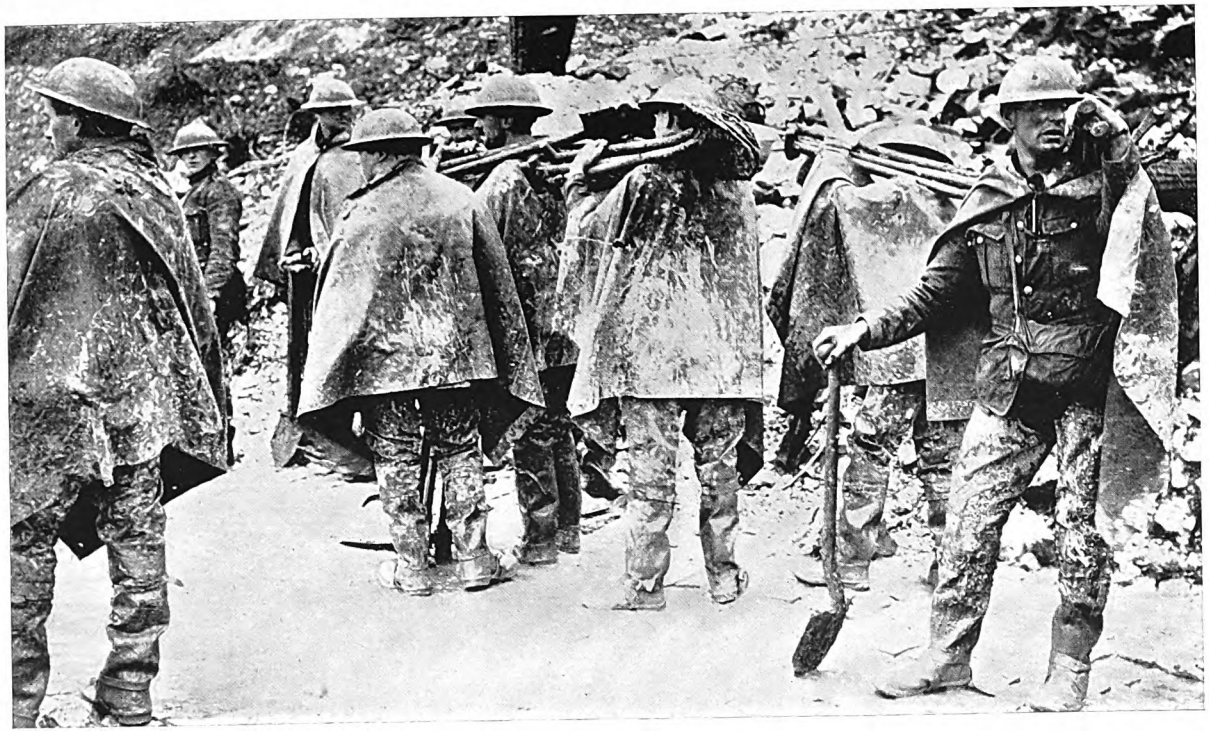
By 7 p.m. the Germans had reached Fismes and Courlandon, and though Romain and Ventelay were still in our hands, the situation was very critical. The enemy maintained the pressure of his attacks during the night, and small bodies penetrated, under cover of darkness, deep into our lines at various points. "By dawn of the 28th the whole of the infantry had completed the difficult operation of wheeling back in the dark through a rough tangle of forest, pivoted on their right and keeping touch on both flanks. The new line taken up by the 21st Division ran through St. Aubœuf to Vadeville Farm; near there the 8th Division continued it along the crest lying south of the Ventelay—Romain valley, at the end of which ridge they joined with the 50th Division." This line was so heavily attacked on the morning of the 28th that a further retirement was made, the Foresters falling back to the heights near Jonchery, thence to the high ground north of Treslon, and thence to the heights north of Bouleuse. The lost ground was hotly contested, and important points were several times taken and retaken in the fluctuations of the fight.

On the night of the 28th the Allied line ran from Rosnay, through Tramery, to Lhery.

All men and officers with the Battalion transport were ordered up to Sarey, under Major Edwards, and these latter were at first directed, on arrival, to carry out a counter-attack on Lhery, where the situation was considered critical; but these orders were cancelled, and on the 29th the party was finally directed to reinforce the ridge of Bouleuse, which was held all night under heavy fire from the German guns and attacks by German infantry, and until near 3 on the afternoon of the 30th. Then the whole of the troops on the spur and in the Mauron valley retired again and took up positions on the Poilly—Mery Premecy road and on the high ground west of Aubilly.

On the 31st the Battalion held a line in front of Bligny, and on the troops in front being driven off the slopes of Aubigny Ridge, the Foresters advanced and helped to restore the situation; this done, they were ordered to take up a line west of Ardre. "The morning of May 31st," wrote General Hamilton-Gordon,

Digitized by Google



[*Photo, Imperial War Museum.*

A Working Party Assembling Prior to a Night's Hard Digging.

When not actually holding Front-Line Positions the Infantry were usually employed as above. Note Gum Boots Thigh, and Waterproof Sheets converted into Capes.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

"found the situation unchanged except that the enemy was making good progress in his general advance towards the Marne valley between Dormans and Château Thierry, and was threatening the British left by his renewed attempts to cover the advance by securing the ridge on which Romigny stands. . . . Exclusive of the 21st Division, in process of being relieved, the four other British divisions were so much reduced in numbers that their fighting strength was little more than that of a single division. They were therefore combined under the one command of General Jeffreys, whose 19th Division" (brought up as a reinforcement on the night of the 29th—30th from the VIIIth Corps, near Châlons) "formed the greater part."

On June 1st the Battalion occupied the second line west of Ardre and just west of Bligny, part attached to the 8th North Staffordshire Regiment and part to the 9th Royal Welch Fusiliers holding the line north-east of Chambrécy. Here the Battalion remained thus distributed throughout June 2nd, and on the 3rd it was ordered to report to Lieutenant-Colonel B. C. James, Durham Light Infantry, appointed to command No. 1 Composite Battalion, 8th Division, in the Bois de Courton, south-west of Nappes, where it remained in reserve. For some three days more intermittent attempts were made to pierce the British line, culminating on June 6th in two fierce attacks on the Montagne de Bligny; these ended in our favour, and proved to be the last serious effort made in this area by the enemy.

In the following letter, the French commander wrote:—

"*Avec une ténacité, permettez moi de dire, toute Anglaise, avec les débris de vos divisions décimées, submergées par le flot ennemi, vous avez reformé, sans vous lasser, des unités nouvelles que vous avez engagées dans la lutte, et qui nous ont enfin permis de former la digue où ce flot est venu se briser. Cela, aucun des témoins français ne l'oubliera.*"

The losses in the 1st Battalion Sherwood Foresters during these days of strain had been terribly heavy. There were: Killed, 1 officer—Lieutenant-Colonel R. F. Moore, D.S.O., M.C.—and 9 non-commissioned officers and men; wounded, 10 officers—Lieutenant G. D. M. Abbotts, Second-Lieutenants C. Ambler, C. E. Cumberland, W. J. R. Elliott, W. L. Green, A. F. Heath, F. R. Hinderlich, F. G. Kyle (Northampton Regiment), A. Millward and W. Noble—and 217 men, while 11 officers and 431 men were missing—a total loss of 680 all ranks. The missing officers were Captain J. F. Menzies, Lieutenants C. W. Laws and A. Straw, Second-Lieutenants W. E. Brown, L. L. Dawson, C. Harrison,* T. E. Inman, A. Neild,* F. D. Severn, D. M. Stuart,* and G. W. Webb.

* Also wounded.

Digitized by Google

Map 4

CHAPTER VI.

JUNE TO DECEMBER, 1918.

THE SECOND BATTLE OF ARRAS: THE END OF THE WAR.

Battle Honour: "*Scarpe.*"

On June 5th, the Sherwood Foresters—what was left of them—being then in the Bois de Courton forming part of No. 1 Composite Battalion, Major J. D. Mitchell, 22nd Battalion Durham Light Infantry (the Pioneer battalion of the 8th Division), was appointed to command. On his arrival the *personnel* consisted of the quartermaster and his staff and the transport officer with his men, while there were also present Major J. Edwards, the second-in-command, and Captain R. G. Pearse, both of whom had just been relieved from duty in the front line. The remainder of the Battalion numbered all told about 110 non-commissioned officers and men, including officers' servants, cooks, drummers, pioneers and headquarter details of every sort and description. Some of these were with No. 1 Composite Battalion and some with No. 2, the commanding officers of these being the only two battalion commanders left in the Division after the heavy losses of May 27th—31st.

On June 9th headquarters and Battalion transport moved to Brussy le Petit, a small village some few miles distant, being joined here three days later by a party about 90 strong, including Lieutenants G. L. Tutin and J. G. Field, Second-Lieutenants G. A. Hancock and H. Greaves, from No. 1 Composite Battalion, which had been relieved in the line on the previous day—the 11th; there remained besides only some 23 other ranks attached to No. 2 Composite Battalion.

This remnant of a battalion marched on the early morning of the 13th to Sezanne and made a brave showing, entering the town with drums beating, and was accorded a great reception by the local population, and also by some French troops quartered there. Here the Battalion entrained and travelled first westward, skirting Paris, then turned north again in the Amiens direction and along the Somme to Pont Rémy, where the train was left and the Foresters marched to Huchenneville, near Abbeville, which was reached on the 14th, and within a very few days of arrival, drafts numbering 22 officers and 658 non-commissioned officers and men had joined—635 of these arriving on one day. The following are the names of some of those who now, or rather earlier, joined the officer corps of our 1st Battalion: Major J. D. Mitchell; Captain W. C. Linay; Lieutenants R. D. Belton, J. W. Houseman and F. H. Taylor; Second-Lieutenants A. A. Chatterton, J. A. Clayton, J. W. Cowen, E. Drury, J. B. Garton, C. W. Hart, E. H. Hart, E. King, B. A. J. Mayo, J. Millward, J. W. Needham, H. Riley, H. H. Stamps, P. Stephenson, G. W. Steel, W. Walker and J. Warburton.

Note: For nearly everything that here follows to the end of the Record the compiler is indebted to Lieutenant Colonel J. D. Mitchell, C.M.G., D.S.O. to whom all possible thanks and acknowledgments are due.

Digitized by Google

A well-known soldier and writer* has laid down that "When a battalion which entered upon a campaign a thousand strong—all keen and hopeful—gets down to five hundred, comrades begin to look round at one another and wonder if any will be left. When it falls to three hundred, or less, the unit, in my experience, is better drawn out of the line. The bravest men lose heart when, on parade, they see with their own eyes that their company—the finest company in the Army—has become a platoon, and the famous battalion a company. A mould for shaping young enthusiasms into heroisms has been scrapped, and it takes a desperate long time to recreate it." And yet not only did the 1st Battalion of our Regiment survive this ordeal, but, thanks to the spirit of all ranks and the organizing powers of its commanding officer, it speedily proved itself again a tried and war-worthy weapon.

On the 19th the Brigade Commander, Brigadier-General L. W. Stevens, D.S.O., inspected the reinforcements and welcomed them to the 24th Brigade, while the next day Major-General W. C. G. Heneker, C.B., D.S.O., saw the whole Battalion on parade, formed up in three sides of a square, with those who had come out of the hell of the Chemin des Dames fighting immediately facing him, and in his remarks made it clear that there was still plenty of stiff fighting before the Battalion.

On June 24th the Battalion moved by march route to Woincourt, near to the sea and in an area very well suited for training, and here training of a most intensive kind was at once put in hand. Fortunately for the resuscitated Battalion, the majority of the officers and other ranks providing its reinforcements came from other battalions of the same Regiment, and consequently were already imbued with the Regimental spirit. Many were from the administrative portions of the battalions which had lately been disbanded, owing to the very heavy losses sustained since the opening of the enemy offensive in the spring, and thus many of the men had served in the transport, or had been pioneers and employed men in their former corps. The initial difficulty in reorganizing was filling up the places of the Lewis gunners, bombers, runners, etc., from men who, however keen they might be and were, had no previous experience of such specialized work; while some of them had not even handled a rifle since they were put through their recruits' course. The commanding officer and his instructors then concentrated on making each man, as far as possible, a master of his weapon, and much time was put in on the ranges. This intensive training bore most excellent fruit, and in the returns of the Division at the Lewis-gun School when it closed down at the end of the war, the 1st Battalion Sherwood Foresters stood top in the 8th Division—the ex-transport men had developed into the expert machine gunners of the Division! Field exercises were also carried out with ball ammunition, and, all ranks displaying the greatest keenness and goodwill, the progress towards the attainment of fighting efficiency was extraordinarily rapid.

At this time a change was made in the organization of the platoon. Instead of being composed, as heretofore, of two rifle and two Lewis gun sections, it was now laid down that the platoon should consist of three sections only, two being rifle sections and one the Lewis gun section, the latter containing eleven men

* Sir Ian Hamilton in his *Gallipoli Diary*, vol. I, p. 315.

Digitized by Google

as against six in the rifle section, and being armed with two Lewis guns. Experience in the spring fighting had shown the advantages of fighting the Lewis guns in pairs, since in continuous fighting a gun is liable to be put out of action, when the advantage of a second gun is obvious.

The Battalion had spent something like a month in the training area when, on July 18th, orders were received for a move to a more active part of the theatre of war, and next day headquarters and two companies entrained at Woincourt —the remaining companies following later—arrived at 5 a.m. on the 20th at Aubigny, and marched thence to "Suburban Camp," near Villers-au-Bois. Two days later a further move was made to Hill's Camp, Neuville St. Vaast, where during the next few hours the 24th Brigade took over part of the line in the Vimy sector opposite Mericourt, the 2nd Northamptons in front line, the 1st Worcesters in support, and the Foresters in reserve. Hill's Camp, where the reserve battalion was located, was in the very middle of an old 1915 battlefield, and was surrounded by old trenches and craters—not an especially cheerful habitation, perhaps, but very useful ground for completing the education of the new drafts in scouting, patrolling, and other exercises. This new sector of the line to which the Battalion was now introduced was, for the present, a quiet one; it had been the scene of hard fighting in April, 1917, when the Canadians captured Vimy Ridge, but at the end of July, 1918, it was not yet possible to resume the offensive in this quarter, and every opportunity was taken to improve and strengthen the defences against any German attack, which was quite possible, since their main strength was concentrated in the group of armies commanded by the Crown Prince Rupprecht, holding this part of the front. Some earnest student of psychology had done his humble best to make the different trenches attractive; they were all named after various ladies of the stage, such as Doris Keane, Vesta Tilley, or Billie Burke!

This front was held until August 18th, when the 8th Division side-stepped to the right, or south, to a point due west of Oppy, and the 24th Brigade now made a rearrangement of its dispositions when up in the line, two battalions being kept in the front disposed in depth, and one in reserve; thus when, on the 25th, the Foresters relieved the Northamptons in the line, they had the Worcesters on their left and a battalion of the 51st Division on their right.

The complete collapse of the great offensive launched by the Germans in the middle of July, and the success of the Allied counter-offensive south of the Aisne, had effected a great change in the military situation; Germany had used up the bulk of her reserves, while reinforcements had reached the Allies, and the American Army was rapidly growing. It was now decided that the favourable situation thus created should be exploited and improved by each of the main Allied armies—British, French, and American—undertaking local offensives, and in the case of the British these resolved themselves into the disengagement of Amiens and the freeing of the Paris—Amiens railway by an attack on the Albert—Montdidier front. The results of these offensives were the Battle of Amiens, which began on August 8th and concluded on the 12th, and the Battle of Bapaume, which, commencing on August 21st, endured until September 1st. Finally, the Second Battle of Arras, or of the Scarpe, as it is

Digitized by Google

called by the Field-Marshal in his despatch of December 21st, opened on August 26th and closed on September 2nd.

On the afternoon of the 26th the 51st Division, on the right of the Foresters, was seen to be in action and evidently gaining ground, and it was then decided to take advantage of this and of the approaching darkness, to establish a series of posts some distance out in No Man's Land and wire them in; but, before any commencement had been made with this work, orders were received to endeavour to occupy part of the enemy's trench system during the night. "B" Company, under Captain Douglas, was detailed for this duty, and started at 1 a.m. on the 27th. Two hours went by, and no tidings of the company having been received, Second-Lieutenant Gerrard, the Battalion intelligence officer, was sent forward to clear up and report the situation; in the meantime Battalion headquarters, which had been situated near the railway embankment, moved forward to Ouse Alley. The night was very dark, the enemy trench system was naturally unknown, and it was not till daylight that men knew exactly where they were and real progress could be made.

South of Oppy Wood several trenches were in our possession, and to the north of the wood "C" Company, under Second-Lieutenant Greaves, moved forward and occupied Kent Road—Duke Street. There was very little enemy opposition; no covering gun-fire was employed, and the Germans were completely surprised, one small group being captured in the act of mending the wire in front of one of their forward posts. The German commander here, finding that the British in his front were in no overwhelming strength, sent bombing parties, supported by machine-gun fire from Oppy Wood, to work their way up the communication trenches and counter-attack, and here the Hun was at an advantage from his better knowledge of the ground. "B" Company was greatly pressed and ran short of bombs, so the most advanced positions south of the wood were gradually evacuated, and a continuous line taken up in Marquis Trench, "C" Company being directed to push forward from Kent Road—Duke Street and link up with the right of "B"; this was successfully done, despite considerable opposition; Captain Pearse was sent up to take command of the two advanced companies; and artillery retaliation on Oppy Wood having been asked for and obtained, the pressure was now sensibly relieved, the advance was resumed, and the enemy bombed back traverse by traverse.

A line was now formed running along Beale Trench, one Vickers gun being placed in position in Ouse Alley, whence it could bring indirect fire on Oppy Wood.

The Battalion was now holding 1,500 yards of front with only two companies, there was a gap between the right of the Foresters and the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of the 51st Division, which had not moved forward, but connection with them and with the Worcesters on the left was maintained by frequent patrols. Two platoons of "D" Company were now sent up in support, and during the night, which passed quietly, "A" Company relieved "B" in front.

On the morning of the 28th the line was strengthened, and strong posts established at all junctions of communication trenches running into our positions.

About 11.30 a.m. the enemy opened artillery fire on our trenches, but the

Digitized by Google

reply was disappointing owing to the fact that a rearrangement of our artillery was at that moment taking place, so that the Germans were able unhindered to put down a really intense barrage on the Battalion's front about 1.50 p.m., and when at the end of ten minutes it lifted, the enemy infantry was seen to be advancing rapidly and in force on both flanks; the S.O.S. for artillery support was sent up, but elicited no response. The whole of our line was now attacked, the enemy coming over the trenches on the right, while those advancing on the left bombed up the communication trenches; hand-to-hand fighting then ensued, and heavy losses were inflicted by both sides, but the enemy attacks were checked, and he was repeatedly driven back. A good defensive line was taken up by the Foresters in the Marquis-Earle trench, where there was a tolerably clear field of fire, and all further enemy advance was repulsed, while "A" Company counter-attacked and regained the posts they held in the morning; but these were later evacuated in order to preserve a continuous line in Marquis-Earle trench and give the guns a good line to shoot on if required.

During the afternoon of the 28th over 3,000 bombs were thrown by the advanced companies, about one-third of this number being German stick bombs taken by the Foresters in the positions occupied on the 27th. Many gallant deeds were performed during this fighting, Second-Lieutenant Spatcher being especially conspicuous; this officer fought for hours on end—bombing, working a Lewis gun, using revolver, rifle, butt and bayonet, personally accounting for several of the enemy, and inspiring his men to renewed efforts by his splendid example.

The losses incurred by the Battalion amounted to 21 non-commissioned officers and men killed, 3 officers—Second-Lieutenants E. King, A. F. Gerrard and R. D. Belton—and 58 other ranks wounded, while 4 men were missing.

The *morale* of the men of the Battalion was raised to a high pitch after this fight, and it was at once decided to take advantage of it to raid the enemy next time the Battalion should be in the line.

During the 29th to 31st the Foresters remained in the support line, and here, on the latter date, the Commanding Officer received the following letter from Major-General Heneker:—

"*My dear Mitchell,*

"*I wish you would convey to all your officers and men who were in the line when the Boche attacked you so heavily on the 28th inst., my thanks for the gallant fight they put up. I can always rely on the 1st Sherwood Foresters to do the right thing. Tell your fellows what I say.*

"*Yours,*

31/8/18. (Sd.) "*W. C. G. HENEKER.*"

On September 1st the Foresters again occupied the front line, and preparations were at once put in hand for the intended raid. They were now on the left of the Brigade front just to the north of Oppy Wood, but quite close to it; in the eastern corner of the wood there was a mound dominating all the country in its immediate neighbourhood, and forming the key to the holding of the wood, which in turn was the main bastion of the Fresnes—Rouvroy line, a switch of the Drocourt—Quéant line. The mound was kept under constant

Digitized by Google

The Sherwood Foresters

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
ASTOR, LENOX
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS

Digitized by Google

observation and was found to be occupied by the enemy both by day and night, and it was decided to make this mound the main objective of the raid, but the greatest secrecy was observed in the matter, nobody being told of the plan except the two officers who were to lead the party, while, in order to make the surprise more complete, it had at first been intended to do without artillery support, but this idea was subsequently abandoned.

Both in and outside the wood the ground was a mass of deep shell holes and was strewn with broken wire, making it very difficult to approach in silence; but at this time the enemy was daily dropping gas shells all over our lines, and this circumstance was taken advantage of by us for facilitating surprise. A gas shelling on our part was therefore in a measure simulated in the hopes that the raiding party would thereby catch the Hun with his gas helmet on, and 5 a.m. on September 7th was to be the time for the raid to "push off."

The three platoons of "C" Company to carry out the raid—right platoon under Second-Lieutenant Spatcher, centre under Second-Lieutenant Greaves (who was also officer commanding the raid), and the left platoon commanded by Sergeant W. B. Smith—were all taken to the rear some days previously, and thoroughly studied the scheme and practised it over prepared ground in company with the gunners who were to co-operate. The platoons were to advance simultaneously, the centre making for Marion Mound, the main objective, the other two taking up supporting positions on the flanks. Second-Lieutenant Greaves's party was to be responsible for searching and destroying any dug-outs in the mound and for capturing prisoners, the remaining platoons preventing any interference with the operations of the centre party, and incidentally clearing and destroying any dug-outs found on the flanks. A battery of 4-inch Stokes mortars was to put down a smoke barrage over the whole front to prevent enemy observation and to cover withdrawal.

Very early on the morning of September 7th a platoon from "A" Company went out with orders to lie out in front of the wood and keep the front clear of all enemy patrols.

The barrage commenced punctually at the appointed hour, and was at once replied to by every enemy machine gun on the Mound, but no damage was caused to the raiding parties moving by the flanks of the wood. As had been hoped, the Germans were found with their gas helmets on; a series of brisk encounters took place in the dark, the opposition being quickly overcome, many Germans were killed and more ran back to their dug-outs, into the entrances of which the phosphorous bombs carried by Second-Lieutenant Greaves's men were flung, causing much alarm, despondency and death among the occupants. Eight prisoners and one machine gun were captured, the former belonging to the 17th Reserve Infantry Regiment.

Of the Foresters, only one man was slightly wounded.

Where all the party engaged did well it is not easy to single any one man out specially, but the conduct of Private C. Sawyer certainly merits mention:—

His platoon encountered opposition in Oppy Wood from an enemy machine gun post, which was rushed, several of the enemy being killed and five men and the gun captured. Private Sawyer was one of the escort for the prisoners, one of whom had been told off to carry the gun; this, however, he succeeded in

Digitized by Google

dropping into a shell-hole unnoticed in the dark. On finding later that the gun was missing Private Sawyer retraced his steps and retrieved the gun, but then, losing his way in the smoke caused by the smoke screen having drifted back, he decided to remain where he was until daylight, when he commenced to withdraw, taking the gun with him. He was noticed by three of the enemy, who stalked and followed him, throwing bombs. Sawyer jumped into a trench leading towards his own lines, the enemy continuing to follow and throw bombs, so Sawyer hid the gun and made for our lines, where he obtained the help of a corporal and another man, who, coming back with him, drove off the enemy, when Private Sawyer again sought and found the gun, finally bringing it back to our lines about 9 a.m.

During the next few days there was a good deal of shelling by the enemy with mustard gas shells, but on September 15th the Battalion was relieved in the front line and withdrawn to Cellar Camp, Neuville St. Vaast, after a tour of twenty-two consecutive days in the trenches.

During this month Captain W. H. Bowmer, Lieutenant K. S. Howard and Second-Lieutenant P. H. Adams joined the Battalion.

During the latter part of September and the first few days of October, the officers and other ranks of the Battalion were engaged in carrying out several important raids against the German positions, with the view of obtaining identifications, finding out the intentions of the enemy, and in what strength he was holding his front line. Much good work was done by parties led by Captains Douglas and Pearse, Lieutenant Clarke and Second-Lieutenant Greaves, but considerable opposition was met with, for the Germans were still inclined to put up a stout resistance, and our casualties were by no means light, Second-Lieutenant Adams being among the killed.

General Heneker now proceeded to carry out a scheme which for some time he had been considering, and for the execution of which he had now received the consent of General Sir A. Hunter-Weston, commanding VIIIth Corps—an attack on the strong Fresnes—Rouvroy line to the north-east of Arras. In the preliminaries of the fighting which ensued the Battalion took a hand, being concerned in a reconnaissance in force on the 5th, whereby the enemy's positions in and about the village of Oppy were definitely located. Next morning, October 6th, "D" Company of the Foresters pushed along Link Trench, capturing a sap previously raided by "D" Company and then another enemy post at the junction with Oppy Support; and, advancing still further, gained the junction of Oppy Support and Lambert Alley, thus practically surrounding Oppy village, which, after some stiff fighting, was entered in the evening; of the garrison 2 officers and 35 other ranks were captured, with 6 machine guns. The same evening "D" Company bombed along Coke Trench, drove the enemy back, and established a post at the junction of Coke and Oppy Support. In the face of considerable opposition they advanced still further, and in the gathering darkness gained the junction of Coke and Chapel in the Rouvroy—Fresnes line, there establishing a strong post.

During the night the enemy counter-attacked and was successfully repulsed, but in the fighting Lieutenant Howard fell mortally wounded.

The following day, the 7th, saw the final attack upon the Rouvroy—Fresnes

Digitized by Google

line, supported by our artillery and the Machine Gun Corps. "C" Company of the Battalion, coming up comparatively fresh from the rear, was chiefly engaged, advancing down Link Trench, then along Oppy Support and up Lambert Alley, and narrowly escaping a heavy bombardment by "Jack Johnsons," of Oppy village. Arrived in the Rouvroy—Fresnes line they worked to the left as far as the junction with Cow Lane, where they joined up with "D" Company and with the Worcester Regiment on the right, while "D" got into communication with the 12th Division on the left. All this was not achieved without hard fighting in the face of a hostile barrage of heavy trench mortars and howitzers, which fell on the captured position and, to a less extent, on the whole area between the company and the village. Our casualties were 6 killed and 10 wounded, but "C" Company alone took 24 prisoners and 2 machine guns.

The enemy was fairly active during the night, but the next day, the 8th, was tolerably quiet, and Battalion headquarters was moved up to the former front line. In the afternoon and early evening an outpost line was established about 500 yards in advance of the trench captured on the 7th and on the outskirts of Neuvireul, which the Northamptons took over on relief early on the 9th, when the Foresters moved back to Ecurie Camp, which was finally reached by road and 'bus from the top of the ridge behind Bailleul* on the evening of the 9th, and arrived at Roclincourt the same evening. Here the Battalion became brigade reserve, after fifteen consecutive days in the front line and eighteen days in all in the trenches, during which they had been kept almost continuously on the "go," but had experienced the supreme satisfaction of capturing Oppy, the bastion of the Fresnes—Rouvroy switch line.

During the last few days events of the very first importance had transpired on all parts of the Allied front; the Battle of Cambrai had been fought and won; the Hindenburg Line had been pierced and the enemy's defence in the last and strongest of his prepared positions had been shattered, while his communications were now seriously menaced; in Flanders, too, the enemy had been advanced upon, defeated and driven back, and forced to withdraw from Lens and Armentières. The Second Battle of Le Cateau was now in progress, while that of the Selle River was about to commence. Already, on October 1st, Hindenburg had told the German Government that peace offers *must* be made to the Western Powers; two days later he repeated these demands; and on the 5th the German Chancellor sent President Wilson a note begging him to treat for the restoration of peace and to invite the Allies to send plenipotentiaries to open negotiations. But on the part of the Army Commanders of the Western Powers there was no halt—the war went on.

At 9 a.m. on October 12th the 1st Battalion Sherwood Foresters began to retrace their steps, marching by way of Bailleul and Oppy to the Fresnes—Rouvroy line, settling down for the night near Neuvireul. Next day the advance was continued. There were many rumours in circulation, and there was a feeling abroad that the end of the war, if not actually at hand, was at least in sight. The Battalion marched to the Drocourt—Quéant Line at a point near Izel-les-Esquerchins, finding excellent dug-outs in this network of trenches vacated by the enemy.

* Not to be confused with the town of the same name near Armentières.

Digitized by Google

The following plans had been drawn up for the action which now appeared to be impending: the 1st Northamptons were detailed to assault and capture the first objective, the Fresnes—Rouvroy line, the 1st Worcesters were to follow through and continue to advance, taking and consolidating various villages as they did so, while the Foresters were directed to make a direct assault upon the Drocourt—Quéant line, part of the so-called Siegfried line and reputed to be of great strength. The plan provided for the co-operation of tanks with the infantry, but as the latter advanced over the ground between the Fresnes—Rouvroy and the Drocourt—Quéant lines it was seen that it had been freely covered with tank traps. The whole area, to a depth of from two and a half to three miles, had been sown with explosive contact mines, but this had been thoroughly examined by the Royal Engineer tunnelling companies and each mine, where detected, had been destroyed.

Three clear days—from the 14th to the 16th—were passed quietly near Izelles-Esquerchins, but on the 17th a move forward was again made, and the Battalion relieved the 1st Worcesters in the dug-outs and huts in a deep railway cutting north of Quiery Lamotte, "A" Company finding quarters in Flers.

On the morning of October 18th the forward troops reported no enemy in the neighbourhood of the canal, and were pushed forward at once to gain touch. In the meantime the Battalion received orders to march to the Pont de la Deule, across the canal and just east of the railway about two miles north of Douai. In accordance with the above the Foresters left the railway cutting at 7.30 a.m. and moved by Esquerchins, Planque, Flers and Auby, crossing the canal here in the neighbourhood of Pont d'Annoy, through a country studded with villages which had up to quite recently been in German occupation, and the houses of which were marked with the accommodation available, while big direction notices were at all the street corners. Pont de la Deule was reached at midday, and here a halt was made to await orders; these, when received, were to the effect that the Battalion should pass through the Worcester Regiment, take over the duty of advance guard of the Brigade, and push on as rapidly as possible, attached being a field battery, a section of machine guns, and a light trench mortar battery; the object was to establish the line Le Catelet—Grand Rue before dusk.

The Battalion was clear of the village of Rache by 4 p.m. and, with "A" Company in front, pushed on rapidly along the railway, entered Flines-les-Raches before dusk, and established outposts on the line mentioned, the enemy rearguards just escaping under cover of the failing light into the Bois de Bouvignes, whence they kept up an intermittent machine gun fire throughout the night. In several of the houses in Flines there were signs of a hurried flight in the meals left uneaten on the tables, and the inhabitants stated that the Germans left as the British entered.

Battalion headquarters for the night was at Ancienne Abbaye, on the western outskirts of Flines, among French people who had not been removed by the German invader, and who now saw British troops for the first time. They were at first speechless with amazement, and could hardly believe that the long-looked-for day of deliverance had actually arrived.

The advance was resumed early on the morning of the 19th, definite objectives being given, attained and made secure, while preparations for the advance

Digitized by Google

[*Photo, Imperial War Museum.*

A Communication Trench through a Wood.

The name of the Wood does not matter, all the woods of the Somme are in much the same condition.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

to the next were put in hand; and by midday the general line of the main road running north and south through Bouvignet, west of the Forest of Marchiennet, was secured, while patrols worked their way through the forest, until by nightfall the troops held the line from Tilloy to north of Bouteau. The guns with the enemy rearguards shelled the country over which the Division was advancing, and a shell fell upon a billet occupied by the Battalion in the village of Le Hem, killing two of our men. The villagers the following morning placed wreaths and an abundance of flowers on their graves, and promised to remove the bodies to the graveyard in the village God's-acre. Four men here were also wounded.

The advance could not be pressed with all the rapidity so desirable, by reason of the difficulty of feeding the troops in a country which had been practically cleared by the invader, and delays and halts were many and unavoidable. The roads, too, had been cut and blocked, bridges blown up and culverts destroyed, but everywhere the inhabitants were to be seen—women, children, and old men—hard at work from morning till night repairing the damage so that the avenging armies might press forward on the tracks of the Hun. It was all-important to get on and give the enemy no time to organize defences behind the Scarpe, which flows through St. Amand, a town of some 15,000 inhabitants in the direct line of the advance of the 8th Division.

On October 20th the Battalion marched on, forming the advance guard, to a point on the western edge of the forest of Marchiennet, but orders came up that owing to the increasing distance from railhead the question of supply to the troops in the forward area was becoming acute, and that consequently, for the next twenty-four hours, a halt must be called and an outpost position taken up. "A" and "D" Companies then established a dug-in line from Le Talbot to east of Brillon, with a combined company headquarters at the cross roads about the centre of the line at Petit Brillon, and an outpost line 1,000—1,500 yards in front. "B" Company was in close support at Sars-et-Rosière, while "C" remained for the night midway between Bouvignies and Les Trois Pucelles, where was Battalion headquarters.

When, on the 21st, the advance was resumed with the town of St. Amand as the objective, "A" and "D" Companies were in front, and with them were a squadron of the 4th Hussars and some cyclists. About noon opposition was encountered, and several sharp skirmishes took place between our forward troops and enemy machine gun detachments concealed in houses on the western outskirts of the town. This opposition was, however, quickly overcome, and our soldiers, pushing on, fighting took place in the streets of the little town. The section of machine guns with the leading companies did admirable work and afforded excellent support to the infantry, the commander finding good positions for his guns in the upper stories of houses, from where he brought fire to bear on the enemy detachments holding important street junctions, also on enemy machine guns on the eastern bank of the Scarpe sited to defend the river crossings. The German commander made great capital out of this, and declared in his next day's communiqué, and even made it the subject of official complaint to the Allies, that machine gun fire had been employed against his troops from the *roof of the church!* Such reprehensible conduct naturally shocked very much the chivalrous Hun, and it was no doubt more in sorrow than in anger—from a

Digitized by Google

mere sense of duty—that he shelled the church on the 22nd, obtaining a direct hit and completely destroying the roof!

During the course of the afternoon the opposition in the town was overcome and the last enemy detachment escaped across a light wooden footbridge, which they destroyed after crossing.

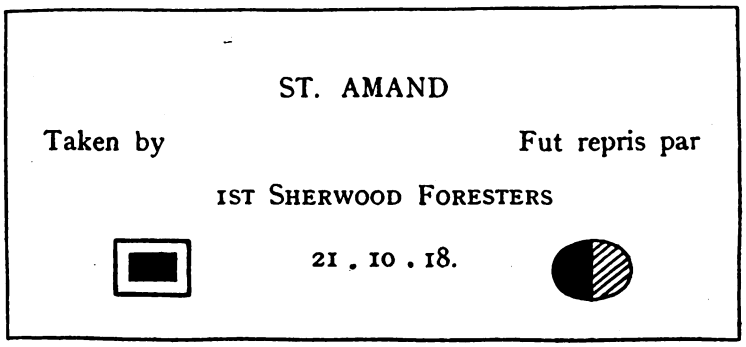
At dusk on this day the position was as follows: the British were in possession of the western bank of the river, which was here some thirty feet broad, deep, and with very steep banks, and our men were ready to attempt a crossing under cover of night; while orders were issued to the forward companies to make all possible effort to secure a footing on the opposite bank during the hours of darkness.

The Sherwood Foresters' post near the Pont de Condé was maintained only with difficulty in the face of the hostile machine gun fire, but towards midnight, by means of planks and beams, a passage was improvised over the skeleton of the railway bridge, and a small party of men, creeping across, established a post on the further bank. Small parties were successfully passed over, and by dawn on the 22nd a platoon of "A" Company had crossed further north and pushed out well east of the river. As the morning advanced more troops got across and substantial progress was made, but at this stage it became obvious that, unless something very unusual should occur, the enemy would now be able to put up a strong resistance, since, barring the further advance of the British, were the very serious obstacles of the River Scheldt and, immediately in rear of it, of the Canal de l'Escaut—barriers which it would be very difficult to pass until the line Valenciennes—Condé could be turned on the south where the river makes a decided bend to the south-east.

By the early morning of the 23rd the Battalion had been relieved at the front and was billeted in the houses of St. Amand, upon the walls of which some wag had inscribed the following verse:—

"The Sherwood Foresters are simply grand,
They captured a town called St. Amand.
And very soon they shortly will
Play bloody hell with Kaiser Bill."

While a wooden board, with the following inscribed thereon, was fixed to a prominent building in the Place:—



(Left bottom the divisional sign, a scarlet square within a larger white square; on the right the Battalion sign in green and brown).

Digitized by Google

Immense stores had been captured with the town, which was a big railway centre and the site of an engineer park, containing huge quantities of war material of all kinds—corrugated iron roofing, iron pickets, barbed wire, timber, sandbags, trench pumps, complete blacksmith's shops with tools and equipment of all kinds, mobile repairing shops, and any number of wagons in different stages of repair; also minnenwerfer and trench mortars.

The enemy, who had now had time to recover and reorganize, concentrated a large number of guns of varying calibre behind the Scheldt Canal, and shelled St. Amand and its environs, causing much damage and driving out the French population in the very hour of their deliverance.

About this time Captain J. Wells, M.C., 1st Battalion Devonshire Regiment, was appointed officiating second-in-command of the Battalion in place of Major J. Edwards, who had taken over the post of Divisional Education Officer.

On October 29th the 24th Brigade having been relieved in the front line, the Battalion marched to billets at Marchiennes, where the greater part of the officers and men occupied a large building which had been used as a German field bakery. Here there was unmistakable evidence of the straits to which the enemy was now put, and the shortness of his food supplies, by the admixture of sawdust with the flour used for baking. Not only was the presence of sawdust to be detected in portions of the dough still adhering to the bread troughs, but sacks of sawdust, so finely ground as to have all the *appearance* of wheat-meal, were found in the bakery.

There were signs that the end of the war was in sight, and events seemed to shape more and more towards a German collapse, but nobody, commander or subordinate, was taking any chances—the aim of all seemed to be to become more fit and more efficient so as to strike the final knock-out blow when the time should come.

"At the end of October Germany's armies on the western front had suffered a series of crushing defeats, her navy was seething with mutiny, her working-class population were on the verge of starvation, the German people were at last aware of the extent to which they had been deceived by their rulers, and all of her allies had collapsed. The military power of the United States was but half developed, the output of the Allied munition factories had not reached its zenith. After a long and bitter struggle we had won a definite superiority in the air, we had aeroplanes ready of a type capable of bombing every town in Germany, and the U-boat menace had been scotched, if not definitely mastered. There could be only one end to the war; the question was when that end would come."*

Surrender was in the air, but the Allied troops were keenly anxious to get as far forward as possible before it came. "This was specially noted among the British troops, who wished to finish the war on the ground where they had started. Take the case of the 8th Division in Horne's First Army. It had spent the winter in the Ypres salient; it had done gloriously in the retreat from St. Quentin; it had fought in the Third Battle of the Aisne; and from the early days of August it had been hotly engaged in the British advance. Yet now it had the vigour of the first month of war."† But Germany now was in as great a

* Maurice, *The Last Four Months*, p. 210.

† Buchan, vol. IV, p. 411.

Digitized by Google

hurry to make peace as in the summer of 1914 she had been anxious to enter upon war, and on Wednesday, November 6th, her delegates left Berlin for the French outposts, on the way to their historic interview with Marshal Foch. They reached the French lines on the night of the 7th, and next day were handed the terms of the Allies and informed that these must be accepted or refused before 11 on the morning of Monday, the 11th. They begged for a provisional suspension of hostilities, a request which Foch curtly refused.

On the 8th the Sherwood Foresters were inspected at Marchiennes by the Divisional Commander, and next day they marched by way of St. Amand, Croisette and Hergnies, the Scheldt Canal being crossed by a pontoon bridge, to Bernissart, which was reached late in the afternoon of the 10th. "The evening and the night were strangely silent," writes the Commanding Officer, "no sound of a shell coming in our direction. The divisional front was a very narrow one, one battalion only, of the 23rd Brigade, being in the line. The morning of the 11th found us still at Bernissart, awaiting orders. At 9.15 a.m. the signalling officer announced that an important order was coming over the wire. It read: *'Hostilities will cease at 11.00 hours. You will stand fast on the line reached at that hour. Report position. There will be no intercourse with the enemy.'*

"The first impression was one of relief that at last the long strain was over, but there was genuine regret on every hand that the last chance of a cut at the Hun was gone." And so the Day of Armistice came.

The Commanding Officer went round the different billets announcing the news to the men, and on every side there was great rejoicing, while all ranks immediately set to work to "clean up" and make ready for the march into Germany, to which all were looking forward with the utmost keenness.

Messages of heartiest congratulation and thanksgiving at once began to come in, and were circulated to and eagerly read by the troops. His Majesty the King, who had followed every movement of the war with such heartfelt interest, wrote:—

"I desire to express at once, through you, to all ranks of the Army of the British Empire, Home, Dominion, Colonial and Indian troops, my heartfelt pride and gratitude at the brilliant success which has crowned more than four years of effort and endurance.

"Germany, our most formidable enemy, who planned the war to gain the supremacy of the world, full of pride in her armed strength and of contempt for the small British Army of that day, has now been forced to acknowledge defeat.

"I rejoice that in this achievement the British forces, now grown from small beginnings to the finest Army in our history, have borne so gallant and distinguished a part.

"Soldiers of the British Army. In France and Belgium the prowess of your arms, as great in retreat as in victory, has won the admiration alike of friend and foe, and has now by a happy and historic fate, enabled you to conclude the campaign by capturing Mons, where your predecessors of 1914 shed the first British blood. Between that date and this you have traversed a long and weary road, defeat has more than once stared you in the face, your ranks have been thinned again and again by wounds, sickness and death, but your faith has never faltered, your courage has never failed, your hearts have never known defeat.

Digitized by Google

"With your Allied comrades you have won the day.

"Others of you have fought in more distant fields, in the mountains and plains of Italy, in the rugged Balkan ranges, under the burning sun of Palestine, Mesopotamia and Africa, amid the snows of Russia and Siberia, and by the shores of the Dardanelles.

"Men of the British race who have shared these successes have felt in their veins the call of the blood and joined eagerly with the Mother Country in the fight against tyranny and wrong. Equally those of the ancient and historic peoples of India and Africa, who have learnt to trust the flag of England, hastened to discharge their debt of loyalty to the Crown.

"I desire to thank every officer, soldier and woman of our Army for service nobly rendered, for sacrifices cheerfully given, and I pray that God, who has been pleased to grant a victorious end to this great crusade for justice and right, will prosper and bless our efforts in the immediate future to secure for generations to come the hard-won blessings of freedom and peace."

The following is a translation of the Order of the Day issued by Marshal Foch :—

"Officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers of the Allied Armies.

"After bringing the enemy's attack to a stand by your stubborn defence, you attacked him without respite for several months with inexhaustible energy and unwavering faith.

"You have won the greatest battle in history and saved the most sacred of all causes, the Liberty of the World.

"Well may you be proud!

"You have covered your standards with immortal glory, and the gratitude of posterity will be yours."

And then, in his despatch of December 21st, 1918, the British Commander summed up the course and the effect of the wonderful efforts of his soldiers :—

"In the months of epic fighting," he wrote, *"the British Armies in France have brought to a sudden and dramatic end the great wearing-out battle of the past few years.*

"In our admiration for this outstanding achievement, the long years of patient and heroic struggle by which the strength and spirit of the enemy were gradually broken down, cannot be forgotten. The strain of these years was never ceasing, the demands they made upon the best of the Empire's manhood are now known. Yet throughout all those years, and amid the hopes and disappointments they brought with them, the confidence of our troops in final victory never wavered. Their courage and resolution rose superior to every test, their cheerfulness never failing however terrible the conditions under which they lived and fought. By the long road they trod with so much faith and with such devoted and self-sacrificing bravery we have arrived at victory, and to-day they have their reward. . . .

"On the different battle fronts 187,000 prisoners and 2,850 guns were captured by us, bringing the total of our prisoners for the present year to over 201,000. Immense numbers of machine guns and trench mortars were taken also, the figures of those actually counted exceeding 29,000 machine guns and some 3,000 trench mortars. These results were achieved by 59 fighting British

Digitized by Google

divisions, which in the course of three months of battle engaged and defeated 99 separate German divisions."

Month by month throughout the four years of war the diaries of the Battalion have religiously recorded the casualties sustained during the month and the total losses incurred to date since hostilities commenced. The last page of the 1st Battalion Sherwood Foresters' war diary for November, 1918, contains the following grim table :—

Casualties to date : Killed—Officers, 35; other ranks, 798. Wounded—Officers, 103; other ranks, 2,984. Missing—Officers, 13. Other ranks, 736. A total of not far short of 4,700 casualties sustained by one battalion of an English county regiment.

The following are the names of those of the 1st Battalion Sherwood Foresters who served continuously throughout the war from November 1914, to November 1918 :—9856 Sergeant-Drummer J. Shipman, 10743 Sergeant E. Overland, 11611 Sergeant G. Hunt, 10548 Corporal E. Coleman, 11146 Corporal J. Last, 6339 Lance-Corporal J. Freer, 5997 Private J. Bemrose, 11750 Private C. Freshney, 6664 Private W. Gregory, 9193 Private J. Hulett, 6062 Private H. Maddison, 11196 Private F. Needham, 7250 Private S. Newton, 6813 Private J. Plant, 9293 Private H. Spencer, 11477 Private E. Whelton, and 10429 Bandsman W. Phillips.

Note.—The official list of "killed" gives :—Other ranks, 1,306; so no doubt many of those returned by the Battalion as "missing" are since presumed to have been killed.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VII.

1919.

FLANDERS AND ENGLAND.

On the day after the announcement of the signing of the armistice the Battalion marched a short distance to Harchies, where it remained until the morning of November 16th, when it proceeded by motor 'bus and motor lorry to Tournai, which was reached on the 17th, and where non-commissioned officers and men found accommodation in the Cavalry Barracks, the officers being billeted in the town. While here the announcement was published as to which corps and divisions were detailed for the march into Germany, when it was found that the 8th Division was to form part of the Army of Occupation in the IInd Corps.

This Army of Occupation, however, had early to be reduced from the dimensions originally intended. The lengthening of the line of communications, and the fact that within a very few days of the commencement of the advance the forward troops were being supplied by motor lorry service at a distance of something between sixty and eighty miles from railhead, made it impossible to despatch the number of divisions provided for in the earlier plans. It must also be remembered that there was a belt of country, varying from thirty to forty miles in width, in which every railway bridge had been destroyed, and the labour involved in reopening rail communications across the devastated area was immense. Consequently, in the regrouping of the divisions which became necessary, the 8th Division was transferred to the IIIrd Corps, and was in hopes of following the IInd Corps later into Germany; these hopes were not fulfilled, and the 1st Battalion of our Regiment remained in Flanders until "all that was left of them" came home again.

Much time was now devoted to the practice of ceremonial drill, while a commencement was made with the carrying out of a scheme of education in the Army which had been thought out when it was realized that the war was indeed drawing to a close. The idea was to ascertain in the first place exactly what was the point of education reached by each soldier, what was the particular subject in which he was chiefly interested, and then, it being noted what available talent for instruction there might be latent among officers and other ranks, to form groups or classes for teaching each particular subject. Immediately after the armistice was concluded the scheme was developed, and to each battalion an education officer was appointed to co-ordinate the work under the supervision and guidance of brigade and divisional education officers. Lieutenant H. C. Clarke, M.C., was the first education officer to be appointed to the Battalion.

The educational scheme was a good one, and, even if it had done nothing else, it at any rate provided some kind of occupation to fill in the time and keep the minds of men employed between the sudden cessation of hostilities and the

Digitized by Google

commencement of demobilization, which was taken in hand as early as possible; and on the subject of this the Commanding Officer lectured to the whole Battalion, appealing to those likely soon to be discharged to civil life for the maintenance of the same spirit of co-operation in facing the problems of reconstruction at home, as had been so splendidly manifested under every kind of adverse circumstances during the war.

For the process of demobilization which everywhere commenced during December, preparations had been made while the war was yet only a few months in progress, for it was early realized that a very great deal would have to be done, when peace should come round, in order to mitigate the distress and confusion which must otherwise be occasioned by the sudden and wholesale disbandment of many hundreds of thousands of men before labour had sufficiently recovered from the war to provide employment enough to go round. Already in January, 1915, a scheme was drawn up and placed before the British Cabinet, wherein proposals were made for meeting all the many difficulties which had been foreseen when the personnel of our huge army should be ready for return to civil life. The proposals made were provisionally approved, but there appearing at the time to be no immediate prospect of their materializing, they were laid aside to be taken up again when the need for carrying them into effect might arise.

As the war progressed, and it seemed more and more certain that it must some day in the near future come to an end, committees were appointed to deal with demobilization in greater detail—a Reconstruction Committee, an Army Demobilization Committee, and others, and it was eventually decided to offer to each soldier on leaving the Army:—

1. A furlough, with pay and separation allowances for four weeks from date of demobilization.
2. A railway warrant to his home.
3. A twelve-months' policy of insurance against unemployment.
4. A money gratuity in addition to the ordinary service gratuity.

Various alternative methods of dispersal were considered, and at first the principle was accepted and followed of granting men release from Army service in an order of priority determined by individual qualifications, the idea of an early reconstruction of the Army after the declaration of peace being carefully kept in view. It followed, then, that in considering and endeavouring to solve the problems of demobilization, the authorities had been guided by national interests—that the Army was to be dispersed in accordance with the requirements of the reconstruction of industry, and by individuals and not by military units.

The scheme, as initially administered, met with no little opposition in many quarters, while a system of "special releases," which had formed no part of the original plan, was justly open to the charge of "favouritism"; serving soldiers could not easily understand why other men had better claims for early discharge than they considered they possessed; hopes were raised which it was not found possible to gratify; and no small difficulty was experienced in making those men who were unavoidably detained with the Colours realize that a state of war still existed, and that for some time at least an army of no inconsiderable size must still be retained in the field. As a result of the many representations made, Army Order No. 55 of 1919 finally abolished the principle of demobilization on

Digitized by Google

industrial grounds, and substituted that of release on grounds of age and length of army service.

On December 7th His Majesty the King, accompanied by the Prince of Wales and the Duke of York, visited Tournai. The Battalion paraded with the remainder of the Brigade at 10.30 in the morning on the Champ des Manœuvres in walking-out dress, and assembled informally on the main Lille road to see the King and the Princes, who had a tremendous reception as they passed on foot between the lines of soldiers before entering their cars and driving off towards Lille.

On the cessation of hostilities a party had been sent to England to bring back to the Battalion its Colours, which had been left behind in safe keeping on embarkation for France in November, 1914. The party, consisting of Second-Lieutenants Greaves and Needham, Company Quartermaster-Sergeant Slater and Corporals Blythe and Ottlewell, arrived back on the night of December 12th, and on the 14th the Battalion paraded on the Champ des Manœuvres and formally took over charge of the Colours, which were carried and escorted by the party which had brought them over from England. The 1st Battalion Sherwood Foresters, over 800 strong all ranks, having formed line and fixed bayonets, the Colour Party marched on to the ground headed by the Drums and Fifes, halting when opposite the centre of the line, when the Battalion presented arms and formed column of companies. The commanding officer then addressed the Battalion, dwelling briefly on the past history of the Regiment, calling to mind the various battle honours embroidered on the Colours; he also touched upon the record of the Battalion in the Great War—a record which he felt sure might well be compared with those glorious records of the past, and said that when their turn came to hand over these Colours to their successors they might feel they could do so not only with pride, but with the conviction that they had borne worthily the great trust committed to their keeping.

The Colours were then marched to the saluting base, and the Battalion marched past in open and quarter column.

At 9 a.m. on the 19th the Foresters left Tournai and marched via Leuze and Ath to Brugelette, on the Ath—Mons road—the weather abominable, with incessant rain and a cold wind. Brugelette was quite a small village, and the Battalion was thrown almost entirely upon its own resources for amusement. Fortunately a German aerodrome-ground provided sufficient room for football, and many inter-company and other matches were played.

The last Christmas of the war was celebrated as well as the somewhat meagre supplies available permitted—"large orders," we read in the Battalion diary, "had been given to the Divisional Canteen for the men's dinners, but only the beer arrived, and the most was made of the rations."

As usual, His Majesty the King remembered his soldiers, to whom he sent the following gracious Christmas greeting:—

"Another Christmas has come round and we are no longer fighting. God has blessed your efforts. The Queen and I offer you Our heartfelt good wishes for a happy Christmas and many brighter years to come. To the disabled, sick, and wounded We send a special greeting, praying that with returning health they

Digitized by Google

may be comforted and cheered by the vision of those good days of peace for which they have sacrificed so much."

So ended 1918! "What a year of memories for those who had been fortunate enough to go through all its vicissitudes and remained alive to tell the tale!"

In the village of Brugelette, where the Battalion remained throughout the whole of January and February and the greater part of March, the companies were thus distributed on arrival: "A," "B" and "D" were accommodated in the Convent of the Holy Child and the orphanage attached, "C" was in a château at the far end of the village, while headquarters was in Brugelette itself.

Demobilization proceeded very briskly during January, men who were coal miners in the far-off pre-war days being the earliest to be released; and by the end of the month one officer, Second-Lieutenant Cadby, and 267 non-commissioned officers and men had left the Battalion on demobilization, while 15 serving soldiers had also gone to England; against these departures one officer and nine other ranks had joined as reinforcements, so that the net reduction in the strength of the Battalion amounted to 273 non-commissioned officers and men. The work of demobilization was now becoming so heavy that a special department was created and staff appointed to deal with it, while the constant reorganization of companies and the appointment of acting ranks threw a great deal of labour on the Battalion staff and company officers.

Towards the end of February, taking advantage of the presence of the Band, which, thirty strong, had arrived from home on the 17th, some of the keen spirits among the younger officers managed to put a pantomime, "The Babes in the Wood," on the boards of the local theatre; it ran with immense success for three nights, Second-Lieutenant Clayton being responsible for the "book of the words" and the arrangement of the music.

During the month 9 more officers and 178 other ranks left for England, and the Battalion was now so weak that further parades were out of the question.

On March 13th Major-General Heneker visited and spoke to the Battalion for the last time, on leaving the 8th Division to take command of the 29th Southern Division, and on the 29th the Battalion proceeded to Ath, expecting every day to receive orders to embark for England. The dwindling process went on with equal severity during March, 6 officers and 80 other ranks going home to be demobilized, while 5 officers were posted for duty to the 53rd (Young Soldiers*) Battalion Sherwood Foresters of the Army of Occupation, and 80 non-commissioned officers and men were detached for duty at Abbeville.

On April 20th the departure of one party of 1 officer and 64 other ranks sent to do duty at Abancourt, and of another of 4 officers and 21 men sent home for demobilization, finally reduced the 1st Battalion Sherwood Foresters to Cadre strength; and it now seemed that it was only the difficulties of transport which prevented or delayed departure for England; one can easily realize how terribly slowly these last few days in Flanders must have gone by: possibly the expletives then employed by the Army in Flanders almost rivalled those of the days of Tristram Shandy! All things must, however, come to an end if one only waits long and patiently enough, and at last, on May 8th, the Cadre and the Band

* Originally raised as Training Battalions for young soldiers of 18 years and 1 month to 18 years and 5 months, they were eventually used under the above title for the Army of Occupation in Germany.

Digitized by Google

entrained at Ath for Dunkirk, which was reached on the following day, the night being spent in camp. Next day, the 10th, embarkation was effected and the Cadre landed at Southampton on the 11th, and, then travelling on throughout the night, Ripon was reached on the morning of the 12th. Here Colonel Mitchell, who had been on leave, rejoined and reassumed command.

The "Old Stubborns" had come home from one more of their many bloody wars.

The following are the names of those who formed the Cadre:—

Captains E. F. M. Puxon, G. A. Hancock and Quartermaster E. E. Lawson; Lieutenants H. R. Bower and H. H. Stamps; Bandmaster A. H. Dewsall, Regimental Sergeant-Major C. Martin, Company Sergeant-Major A. Mann, Company Quartermaster-Sergeant E. Bealey, and Cook-Sergeant A. Morton; Sergeants C. E. Bradley, E. Tranter and H. Taylor, Acting-Sergeant F. Godley, Lance-Sergeant J. A. Hiam; Lance-Corporals J. E. Smith, A. Allevi, P. C. Baldwin, F. M. Coates, H. Tippett and N. Wilks; Acting-Corporal J. W. Last; Privates C. Bebbington, T. Chorley, A. F. Cootes, H. Chalk, F. P. Forster, R. R. Frape, A. Frakes, W. R. Hotton, P. W. Hall, W. Kilmister, C. F. Lynch, W. Maxwell, T. Moore, J. Missett, W. Naylor, W. H. Orme, W. Paviour, H. Palmer, W. Parish, W. Phillips, L. Powdrill, W. Rowland, G. R. Roose, A. L. Salt, G. H. Skeavington, E. B. Tullett, C. Taylor, A. Walker, A. J. Wallbank, C. J. Wootten, T. W. Watts, A. Wilson and J. Wright; Boys F. C. Bryant, A. Clemer, R. M. Cotton, F. Cutts, H. Critchell, A. Goddard, T. P. Jennings, W. H. Lawton, C. McTernan, W. H. Millward, A. E. Salisbury, W. G. Woodhall and H. E. Wells.

A few days were spent in Ripon, where all the warlike stores brought home by the Battalion were handed in to the Ordnance Department, and then, on May 17th the remnant of the 1st Battalion Sherwood Foresters proceeded by train to Nottingham—the city, if not actually of the birth of the 45th Regiment, at least that of its adoption—and the reception which the Cadre there received from the civic authorities, can best be described in the account given of all that this day took place in the columns of the *Nottingham Guardian* of May 19th.

The enthusiasm of the people of Nottingham was unbounded, and the experience to those taking part in the events of the day was one never to be forgotten. The one regret in the minds of those thus honoured was that the whole Battalion, as it stood on Armistice Day, could not have come home to the ancient city together.

"On Saturday Nottingham extended an enthusiastic welcome to the Cadre of the 1st Battalion Sherwood Foresters, the old 45th Nottinghamshire Regiment, perhaps better known as the 'Old Stubborns,' on its return from active service in France.

"The city was gay with flags and decorations in honour of the men who have seen as much fighting as any regiment in the British Army and more than many. The Battalion was in India when war broke out, and came over with the first Indian contingent, being at once thrown into the fighting line, where it remained throughout the war, suffering heavy casualties and adding glorious pages to the history of the Regiment.

Digitized by Google

"In the Somme fighting no unit earned greater fame, and its record was ever the same, at Villers Bretonneux, on the Marne, in the Oppy Sector, and then in the big advance, during which the soldiers of Notts and Derbyshire captured the town of St. Amand. On Armistice Day they were not very far from Mons, on their way to relieve the Canadians. But to recount their many 'battles, sieges, fortunes' would take more space than we have at command now. It is interesting to note, however, that the Battalion, or part of it, was last in Nottingham in 1914, when on March 5th they deposited the Colours of the old 45th at the Castle, the ceremony being marked by all the civic dignity due to such an occasion. General Sir H. Smith-Dorrien, whose name will always be associated with the Regiment, was present at that ceremony five months before the war, and many others who took part are recalled to memory by Saturday's historic reception to the party of 6 officers and 68 men.

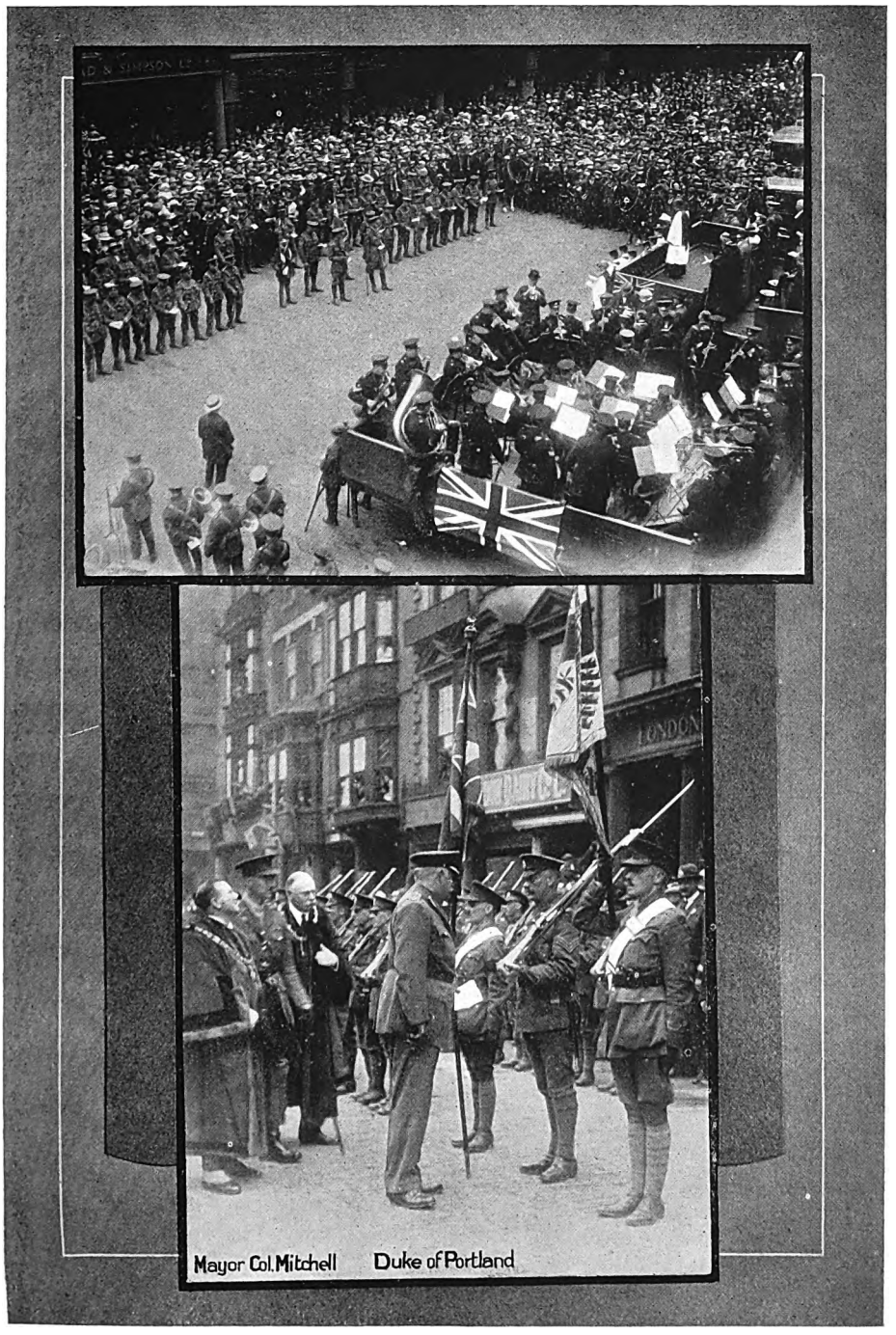
"The Cadre arrived from Ripon in the early afternoon, and was received by the Duke of Portland (Lord-Lieutenant of the county), the Mayor, wearing his robes and preceded by the mace, the Sheriff, the Town Clerk, the Chief Constable, Colonel Danberry, and numerous other officers. With Alderman Pendleton was the Mayoress, and several other ladies were on the platform. Mr. Wood, secretary of the Discharged and Demobilized Sailors and Soldiers, was also noticed. The Regimental band headed the Cadre, in the centre of which were the Colours. The Duke, who arrived early, saluted the latter, and Lieutenant-Colonel J. D. Mitchell, D.S.O., took command of his men, the other officers being Captain and Adjutant G. A. Hancock, Captain E. F. M. Puxon, Lieutenant H. R. Bower and Second-Lieutenant H. H. Stamps.

"Outside the Midland Station a great crowd awaited the Foresters, and when they marched into view the people gave expression to their feelings, and cheered again and again, for Nottingham realized its debt to these men, and it is doubtful whether the streets have ever been so crowded since the Royal visit of 1914. Surging after the men along Carrington Street, Wheeler Gate and on to the Exchange Hall, there came dense crowds shouting welcome to the heroes. The heat was intense; all traffic was diverted, the police and special constables handling the situation with skill. Outside the principal entrance to the Exchange Hall platforms had been erected, on one of which the City Police band, conducted by Inspector Hewitt, gave an excellent programme of music, and it was from the other that the Cadre was officially welcomed to the city.

"First came a short service conducted by Canon Field, Vicar of St. Mary's, beginning with prayer and the hymn, 'Onward Christian Soldiers,' and ending with that other impressive national hymn, "O God, our Help in ages past," and it was while Canon Field was reciting the prayers of thanksgiving for the victory gained that it became obvious that thousands of people would be unable to hear the addresses of welcome. This disadvantage was, however, unavoidable in the circumstances, and the Duke of Portland was able to overcome it to a certain extent owing to his gift of clear enunciation.

"His Grace said: 'It is a very great pleasure and I consider it a very great honour, in the name of the county of Nottingham, to welcome you all home after the glorious part you and the other battalions of the Notts and Derbyshire Regiment—the gallant Sherwood Foresters—have taken in the war, which, by the

Digitized by Google



RECEPTION OF 1ST BATTALION CADRE AT NOTTINGHAM.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

valour and fortitude of you and your comrades, has now been brought to a victorious conclusion.

"'While welcoming you we think with pride and regret of those who went out with you, but who, alas, have not returned. We know how gallantly they fought side by side with you beneath the British flag, and thanks to them and to you, we have gained this glorious victory. Our sympathies go out most heartily to their nearest and dearest who mourn their loss. Many also of your comrades have been wounded, and some of them have been maimed for life. To them we are equally as grateful as we are to you. In a very short time we hope that peace will be signed with Germany, and that anxiety on that score will, at all events, be relieved. By your assistance we have gained a great victory over Germany, and never in our history has the British nation stood so high.

"'Englishmen, Scotsmen, Welshmen and Irishmen, together with our colonial brethren, may well be proud of the race to which they belong. It is a proud boast, and a legitimately proud boast, to be able to say, 'I am a British citizen,' for by the valour of British citizens the freedom of the world has been saved, that it has been placed upon a secure basis for all time to come.

"'Once again, in the name of the county of Nottingham, I welcome you home, and I assure you that we are all most proud of you, and that we are extremely grateful to you for all that you have done.'

"Then came a few well-chosen words from the Mayor, who voiced the feelings of pride experienced by the citizens upon seeing the gallant representatives of the fine old Regiment. He wished the men all that good fortune could bestow, and was followed by the Sheriff, Councillor J. Morris. Speaking in similar terms, he expressed the hope that when demobilized the officers and men would be happy and successful in civil life.

"A soldierly speech of acknowledgment by Lieutenant-Colonel Mitchell followed. It was tinged by a note of sadness occasioned by a reference to the fallen.

"'The King' having been played by the Police Band, the Duke called for three cheers for His Majesty, and then for the troops standing at "Attention" behind him, after which the officers and men were entertained to dinner by the Mayor, and further speeches of welcome and goodwill were delivered."

At the conclusion of this memorable ceremony the Cadre returned to Ripon, and proceeded next day to Derby, being met there by the civic authorities and officially welcomed at the Town Hall, then going on to Normanton Barracks, where the Colours were formally handed over to the Officer Commanding the Depot.

On May 19th the Cadre dispersed.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

THE SECOND BATTALION IN THE GREAT WAR

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Maps 1, 2 and 3

CHAPTER I.

THE OPENING OF THE WAR.

ALMA DAY, 1914.

Battle Honours:

"*Aisne*, 1914," "*Armentières*, 1914."

By 11 p.m. on August 4th, 1914, no satisfactory reply having been received from the German Government regarding the observation of the neutrality of Belgium, the British Foreign Office issued the following statement shortly after midnight:

"Owing to the summary rejection by the German Government of the request by His Majesty's Government for assurances that the neutrality of Belgium will be respected, His Majesty's Government have declared to the German Government that a state of war exists between Great Britain and Germany as from 11 p.m. on the 4th August."

Orders for the mobilization of the Army had already been issued some few hours previously, the Territorial Force had been embodied, the Naval Reserves called out, and arrangements made for safeguarding arsenals and docks and for ensuring the free passage of troops by rail to the ports of embarkation. On August 5th and 6th meetings attended by Cabinet Ministers and by—among other soldiers—Lord Kitchener, who became Secretary of State for War on the latter date, and by Field-Marshal Sir John French, the Commander-in-Chief elect of the British Expeditionary Force, were held to consider the conduct of the war and the employment and disposition of the force to be sent to France. It was an acknowledged fact that from the year 1911 the British and French staffs had worked out in detail a scheme for the landing of an Expeditionary Force in France, it was accepted that the one cavalry and six infantry divisions of which the force was composed would be sent across the Channel under certain circumstances necessitating our affording material assistance to the French, and that its concentration would take place in the area Maubeuge—Le Cateau—Hirson. The result of the meetings of ministers and the naval and military chiefs was that a decision was come to that for the present two infantry divisions must be retained in the United Kingdom, while the remaining four, *plus* the cavalry division, should proceed to France, embarkation commencing on August 9th.

The point of concentration was also reviewed, and Lord Kitchener expressed the opinion that the place of concentration was too far forward, and should not be in advance of Amiens, but though this matter was not for the present settled, the original arrangement was ultimately adhered to.

The Expeditionary Force, then, which left England in the first half of August, 1914, consisted of two Army Corps, each of two divisions, and a cavalry division. The Ist Army Corps comprised the 1st and 2nd Divisions, and was

Digitized by Google

commanded by Lieutenant-General Sir Douglas Haig, while the IInd Corps was made up of the 3rd and 5th Divisions, and was in the first instance placed in charge of Lieutenant-General Sir James Grierson, who, on his death in the train on August 17th, was succeeded by General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien, of our Regiment. The commander of the Cavalry Division was Major-General E. H. H. Allenby.

In August, 1914, the 2nd Battalion of the Regiment was stationed at Sheffield, and formed part of the 18th Brigade of the widely-dispersed 6th Division. The Division was commanded by Major-General J. L. Keir, C.B., and the two other brigades, the 16th and 17th, of which it was composed were quartered in Ireland, the one at Fermoy, the other at Cork. The commander of the 18th Infantry Brigade was Brigadier-General W. N. Congreve, V.C., C.B., M.V.O., and his troops were at the time serving in the Northern Command, his units being one at Sheffield, one at York, and two at Lichfield, where was the Brigade Headquarters. The Brigade contained the 1st Battalions of the West Yorkshire and East Yorkshire Regiments, and the 2nd Battalions of the Sherwood Foresters and Durham Light Infantry.

Early in August the Battalion was temporarily absent from its station undergoing training with other units in North Wales, but so soon as war became in any degree imminent the camp was broken up and the different corps returned to their quarters, the Battalion being sent back to occupy Hillsborough Barracks, Sheffield, 200 men, under the second-in-command, being provisionally sent to North Shields, but these rejoined headquarters a few days later.

At 7.32 p.m. on August 4th orders to mobilize were received, and while inside barracks all proceeded with method and according to plan, outside the gates was a scene of wild excitement and enthusiasm, the vicinity being crowded by people shouting and singing patriotic songs, while the appearance of anybody of whatever rank in uniform was greeted with cheering. The work of mobilization went steadily on, and was carried out in a manner which reflected the greatest credit on the Battalion staff.

On August 6th 350 Reservists arrived from the Depot, and on the 7th orders were suddenly received to entrain for Edinburgh, the reason for this—to the battalions of the 18th Brigade most disappointing—decision, being that in order to lessen the chance of any German landing in force interfering with the other portions of the British Expeditionary Force, it had been judged expedient that the 18th Infantry Brigade of the 6th Division should move to Edinburgh, while two brigades of the 4th Division were to proceed to York and Cromer, in each case accompanied by artillery. For the further protection of the East Coast from invasion, five cyclist battalions and the Yeomanry Mounted Division were also sent thither, the 3rd Brigade of the 4th Division being already stationed at Colchester. The 16th and 17th Brigades of Major-General Keir's command remained for the present in Ireland.

The Battalion entrained late at night at Sheffield, in two trains, at a strength of 30 officers and 929 other ranks, and at the time of departure probably but very few had any idea of what their destination was to be; a somewhat round-about route via Nottingham was followed, and all were much surprised to be held up very early on the morning of August 8th at Berwick-on-Tweed, owing to the

Digitized by Google

axle of one of the carriages having caught fire. On arrival at Edinburgh the 2nd Battalion Sherwood Foresters was for the first two or three days accommodated in the Cavalry Barracks at Piershill, being then encamped in the King's Park during the rest of their stay in the northern capital, and here 41 more non-commissioned officers and men joined. On August 15th, however, the two other brigades of the Division, having completed their mobilization in Ireland, commenced embarking for England at Cork and Queenstown, and by the 18th of the month the whole of the 6th Division was concentrated in camps in the neighbourhood of Cambridge and Newmarket. Here the news of the early actions of the war and of the commencement of the great retreat began to filter through from France, and, since all ranks were eagerly longing to get to the front, the three weeks which still had to be "put in" guarding the East Coast from invaders who did not materialize, passed all too slowly, but they were weeks not ill-spent; they enabled the serving soldiers, and the older men who had rejoined from the Reserve, to shake down into their places, and the latter especially to get fit, and "fitted," and resume the old army life where they had laid it down. At Cambridge the Battalion was under canvas on Midsummer Common, and while quartered in this neighbourhood all ranks were the recipients of much kindness and hospitality, the recollection of which was not readily effaced by the more grim events which followed after. While here 22 more other ranks joined and 11 men were sent back to Sheffield as unfit for war service.

On September 7th the long-awaited embarkation orders were received, and the Battalion marched at short notice to Newmarket, there to entrain for Southampton. This march was almost the first real test of general fitness; it was a very hot day and the men were in full marching-order, and many men in the Brigade fell out *en route,* but the casualties in the Battalion compared very favourably with those in some other units.

During the last few days "the rapid advance of the Germans to the west had made the bases at Boulogne and Havre unsafe, and had actually dispossessed the British of their advanced base at Amiens. The advisability of a change of base was foreseen by the Q.M.G., Major-General Sir William Robertson, as early as the 24th August, and from that date all further movement of men or stores to Havre and Boulogne was stopped. By the 27th Boulogne had been cleared of stores and closed as a port of disembarkation; and on the 29th St. Nazaire on the Loire was selected as the new base. . . . By the 30th August the Inspector-General of Communications, Major-General Robb, had telegraphed his requirements in tonnage to Southampton; and on the 1st September the transports for the troops were ordered to Havre. . . . In four days 20,000 officers and men, 7,000 horses and 60,000 tons of stores had been shipped from Havre to St. Nazaire, a very considerable feat of organization."*

These measures naturally seriously retarded the arrival at the front of the reinforcements demanded by the losses in action already sustained by the Ist and IInd Corps, and the shipment of the 6th Division to the theatre of war.

On arrival at Southampton the Battalion at once began to experience some of the discomforts inseparable from active service even in Europe; the *Georgian,*

* Official History of the War. Military Operations, vol. I, p. 263.

Digitized by Google

in which it was to embark, was no better than a cattle boat, with little beyond deck accommodation for all ranks; many of the Foresters had never before been to sea, and the English Channel was not in its most attractive mood; consequently all were rejoiced when St. Nazaire was reached on the evening of September 11th, and the cheery adventurers disembarked, though few can have then realized that very many would never return home to England, or that four long and bloody years must go by before the World War would at long last come to an end.

Disembarkation began at 11 p.m. and proceeded briskly enough until it became necessary to unload the carts and waggons, which had to be each individually hoisted up from the hold and lowered to the ground; to allow this to be done the ship had to be warped along the quay, so that it was midday on September 12th before the last of the waggons was off the ship.

The following are the names of the officers who landed in France with the Battalion:—

Lieutenant-Colonel C. R. Crofton-Atkins, in command; Majors P. Leveson-Gower and R. J. F. Taylor; Captains B. G. V. Way, M.V.O., C. C. Parkinson, M.V.O., R. S. Popham, D.S.O., G. F. Luther and J. H. Mathias; Lieutenants G. D. Edwards, Brigade machine-gun officer, L. A. Bernard, B. C. Ash, J. MacD. Needham, R. R. Shawcross, Battalion machine-gun officer, and P. M. Murray; Second-Lieutenants H. L. Paddock, transport officer, R. E. C. Weigall, I. G. Macbean, H. B. D. Willcox, W. A. W. Crellin, R. D. P. Milner and J. D'A. Whicher; Captain W. R. Frend, adjutant; Captain F. Tomlinson, quartermaster; and Captain R. D. O'Connor, R.A.M.C., in medical charge. Second-Lieutenants H. L. C. Smith and B. G. Allen, Special Reserve, were attached for duty.

The following are the names of the senior warrant-officers and staff-sergeants who disembarked with the Battalion:—

Regimental Sergeant-Major A. Troops, Orderly-Room Clerk E. Lound, Armourer-Sergeant D. Hepburn, Pioneer-Sergeant E. Hewitt, Transport-Sergeant W. H. Cooke, Shoemaker-Sergeant C. H. Battersby, Machine Gun Sergeant L. Mortimer, Signalling-Sergeant J. Farley, Sergeant-Drummer C. Martin and Sergeant-Cook F. Barratt.*

The composition of the four companies was as under:—

"*A Company*.—Captains Parkinson and Mathias; Second-Lieutenants Willcox and Milner; Company Sergeant-Major T. M. Cuckson and Company Quartermaster-Sergeant W. McDonald.

"*B*" *Company*.—Captain Way; Lieutenants Needham and Murray; Second-Lieutenants Weigall and Crellin; Company Sergeant-Major G. N. Royce and Company Quartermaster-Sergeant H. Thorpe.

"*C*" *Company*.—Captains Popham and Luther; Lieutenant Ash; Second-Lieutenants Whicher and Allen; Company Sergeant-Major J. Turner and Company Quartermaster-Sergeant J. Seagrave.

"*D*" *Company*.—Major Taylor; Lieutenant Bernard; Second-Lieutenants

* Regimental Quartermaster-Sergeant A. W. Clarke came out from England with the first reinforcement to join the Battalion.

Digitized by Google

Macbean and Smith; Company Sergeant-Major F. Ward and Company Quartermaster-Sergeant A. W. Tomalin.

From the nominal roll kept at the base by Quartermaster-Sergeant (O.R.S.) Mason, it appears that the strength of the Battalion on disembarkation in France was 6 warrant officers, 46 sergeants, 48 corporals, 16 drummers and 814 privates —a total of 930.

The following was the message from the King to his Army:—

"You are leaving home to fight for the safety and honour of my Empire.

"Belgium, whose country we are pledged to defend, has been attacked and France is about to be invaded by the same powerful foe.

"I have implicit confidence in you, my soldiers. Duty is your watchword and I know your duty will be nobly done.

"I shall follow your every movement with deepest interest and mark with eager satisfaction your daily progress; indeed, your welfare will never be absent from my thoughts.

"I pray God to bless you and guard you and bring you back victorious."

To every soldier Field-Marshal Lord Kitchener addressed the following letter:—

"You are ordered abroad as a soldier of the King to help our French comrades against the invasion of a common enemy. You have to perform a task which will need your courage, your energy, your patience. Remember that the honour of the British Army depends on your individual conduct.

"It will be your duty not only to set an example of discipline and perfect steadiness under fire, but also to maintain the most friendly relations with those whom you are helping in this struggle. The operations in which you are engaged will, for the most part, take place in a friendly country, and you can do your own country no better service than in showing yourself in France and Belgium in the character of a true British soldier.

"Be invariably courteous, considerate and kind. Never do anything likely to injure or destroy property, and always look upon looting as a disgraceful act. You are sure to meet with a welcome and to be trusted; your conduct must justify that welcome and that trust.

"Your duty cannot be done unless your health is sound, so keep constantly on your guard against any excesses. In this new experience you may find temptations both in wine and women. You must entirely resist both temptations, and while treating all women with perfect courtesy, you should avoid any intimacy.

"Do your duty bravely.

"Fear God.

"Honour the King."

At the date when the 6th Division had landed at St. Nazaire, the Battle of the Marne had come to an end, the German retreat was in progress, and on September 14th troops of the Ist, IInd and IIIrd British Corps had crossed the Aisne at various points in pursuit. Two at least of the British corps already in the field were by this time greatly weakened in consequence of losses sustained in the opening battles of the war, and were also much exhausted by the hard and continuous marching during the retreat, so that fresh troops were urgently

Digitized by Google

needed at the front and the 6th Division was hurried up from the port of disembarkation. The 18th Brigade, on being entrained, proceeded by rail as far as Coulommiers, and *en route* all ranks of the Battalion were greatly touched by the hospitality of the ladies of Chateaubriand, who had set up a buffet at the railway station and regaled the troops with all sorts of good things, also serving out picture postcards on which officers and men were able to send a few lines to anxious ones at home.

The night was spent at Coulommiers, and next day the Brigade marched on to and was billeted at Douai; here orders to push on were received, and the onward march was resumed via St. Cyr, Manteuil sur Marne, Romeny, Château Thierry, Chacrise and Dhuizel to the Aisne at Bourg. Near Dhuizel all ranks were gratified and heartened by meeting General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien, Colonel of the Regiment and Commander of the IInd Corps.

On arrival at the Aisne the Division was "temporarily broken up in order to provide relief to the war-worn troops of the first five divisions. The 17th and 18th Infantry Brigades were attached to the Ist Corps and the 16th to the IInd Corps. The 17th Infantry Brigade became Corps Reserve, releasing the Ist Cavalry Division, which from the 19th September onwards furnished 500 rifles for the trenches about Chavonne. . . . The reinforcements, together with the improvement of the defences, rendered two brigades sufficient to defend a sector for which three had hitherto been necessary; as a result, on the 19th September the 1st (Guards) and the 2nd Infantry Brigades were withdrawn from the trenches for a few days rest; and the line, which had hitherto absorbed the whole of the 1st Division, was defended by the 3rd and 18th Infantry Brigades alone."*

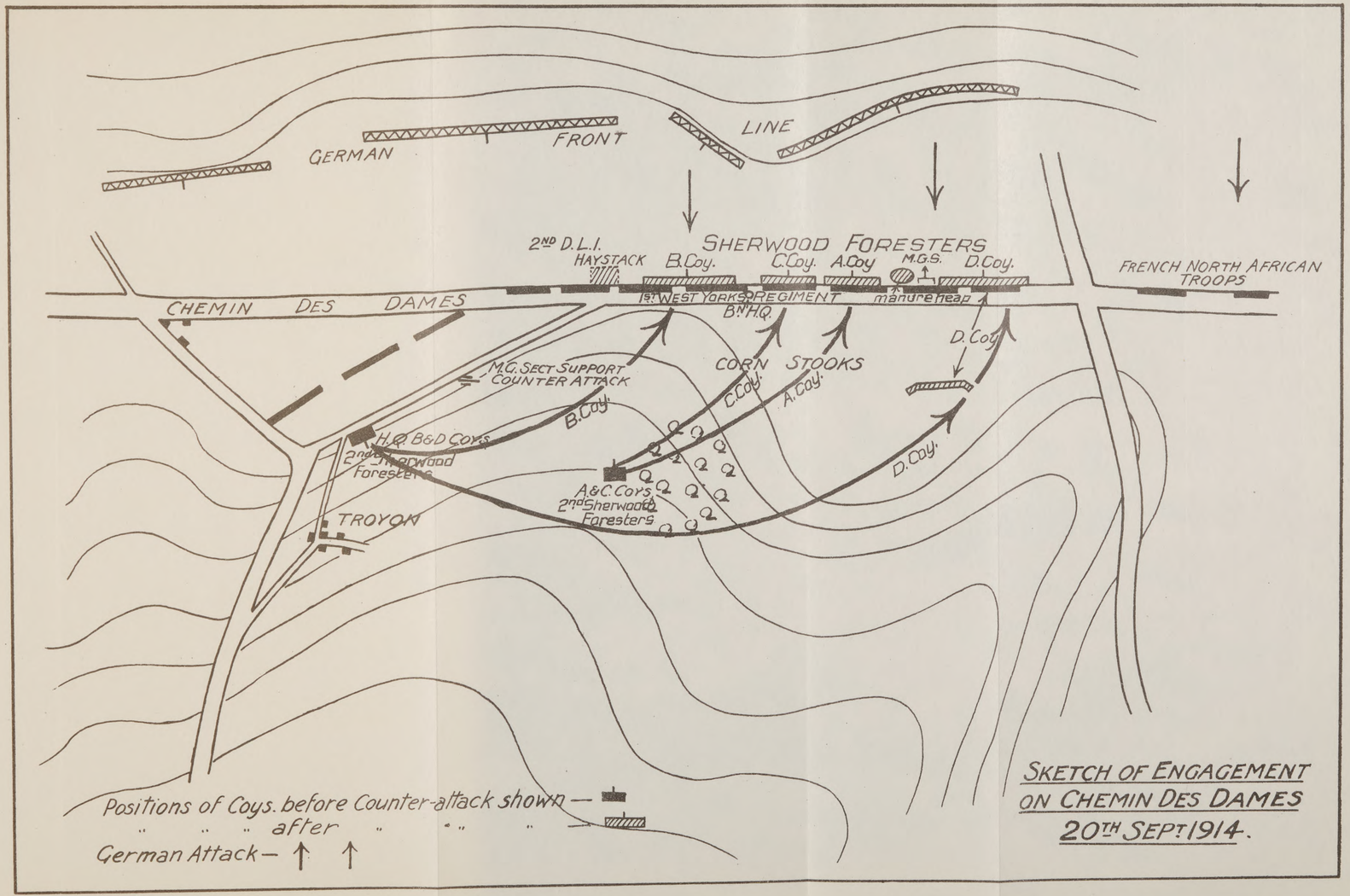
The 18th Brigade consequently relieved the 1st Brigade, the Foresters taking the place of the 1st Battalion Black Watch in the trenches near Vendresse, but it was not long before they were in turn relieved by the 1st Battalion Gloucestershire Regiment, of the 3rd Infantry Brigade, and moved into reserve position just north of Troyon. The front taken over by Brigadier-General Congreve's command ran diagonally from north-east to south-west along the high ground just south of the Chemin des Dames to the north and north-east of Troyon.

Rather less than a week previously Major-General Maxse's brigade, attacking from the direction of Vendresse—Troyon—Paissy, had captured this high ground and driven the enemy off for about a mile and a half north of the Sugar Factory, which stood on commanding ground. The ground then won could not be held, mainly for the reason that the French operating on the right had not been equally successful, the possession of the Factory passed out of British hands, and all Maxse's men could do was to hold on to the edge of the plateau.

The line was practically the same when taken over by the 18th Brigade, and formed anything but an ideal position, the trenches, which had been hastily traced, being just at the edge of so well-marked a feature as the main road. On the morning of September 20th—"Alma Day"—the 1st Battalion East Yorkshire Regiment held the left of the line, the 2nd Battalion Durham Light

* Official History, vol. I, pp. 384, 385.

Digitized by Google



SKETCH OF ENGAGEMENT ON CHEMIN DES DAMES 20TH SEPT 1914.

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

Infantry was in the centre, and the 1st Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment was on the right, while the 2nd Battalion Sherwood Foresters was, as already stated, in reserve near Troyon.

"On the 20th September, General von Heeringen, commanding the German Seventh Army, ordered a general attack by the whole of the VIIth Reserve Corps. The day was cold, and at times there were heavy showers of hail.

"Soon after dawn the Germans attacked the Moroccans immediately on the right of the British line, and drove them back. The officer commanding the 1st West Yorkshire Regiment, which was the right battalion of the British Army, thereupon sent out a company to cover his exposed flank. The Moroccans soon rallied and came forward again, when, not knowing what had happened, they fired into this company, inflicting some thirty casualties. The line then settled down again under a heavy fire from German artillery and rifles. A second German attack, made between 10 and 11 a.m., was effectively checked by the West Yorkshires. Between noon and 1 p.m. the enemy delivered a third attack under cover of a heavy storm of rain, and once again the Moroccans fell back. Once again Lieutenant-Colonel Towsey, commanding the West Yorkshires, threw out a company eastward to protect his right; at the same time asking help from the 2nd Cavalry Brigade at Paissy. But before this could come, the enemy, from the gap left by the Moroccans, enfiladed and, after inflicting heavy casualties, charged and captured the remnants of the right company of the West Yorkshires. Within half an hour, working down the line, the Germans were in occupation of the front trenches of the battalion, and had swept what remained of two more companies into captivity. The officer commanding led forward his one remaining company to retrieve the situation, but being met by heavy fire on his front and right flank, whereby he himself was wounded, fell back on the cavalry at Paissy.

"The disaster to the West Yorkshires laid open the flank of the Durham Light Infantry, who were next on their left, and exposed them to so destructive an enfilade fire, that the East Yorkshires, on the left of the Durham Light Infantry, were sent to relieve them by a counter-attack. No sooner, however, did they leave their trenches than they were beaten back to them by an overwhelming shrapnel and machine-gun fire."* Thus the Official History, but by Battalion accounts this counter-attack came later.

The repeated demands for assistance—the last from the West Yorkshires was sent back shortly before 1 p.m.—were responded to by the 2nd Cavalry Brigade and by a battalion from Paissy, but the 2nd Battalion Sherwood Foresters had already gone forward from Brigade Reserve at Troyon to see what could be done by them to save the situation and regain the lost trenches.

The earlier attacks delivered by the Germans on this day had caused the order to be issued for "A" and "C" Companies of the Sherwood Foresters, nearest to the French lines, to "stand by," and when later the firing became heavier it was seen that something of a very serious nature had occurred in the advanced and right trenches in occupation by the 18th Infantry Brigade, and then, towards 2 p.m., a counter-attack was delivered by the Battalion. "A" Company (Captain Parkinson) and "C" Company (Captain Popham) led the

* Official History, vol. I, pp. 389, 390.

Digitized by Google

attack on right and left respectively under Major Leveson-Gower, moving along the plateau on the side of the hill and making, the left company for a haystack and the right company for a small copse, when the enemy soon brought up machine guns, and the debouching line came under a heavy and accurate fire, causing many casualties and a momentary check, during which a very rapid and accurate rifle fire developed as the second line came up, quelling at once most of the German machine guns. In the second line were "B" Company (Captain Way) and "D" Company (Major Taylor). There was little or no artillery support forthcoming, but none the less the advance pressed on. Captain Popham was almost at once hit in several places, but his men pushed forward and attempted to get nearer the enemy by way of the valley, but lost heavily; "A" Company moved up the right side of the valley and advanced towards a hedge, near which Captain Parkinson was wounded; while "D" Company worked round by the rising ground on the right, and so it was not long before the West Yorkshire trenches from which the Germans had been firing were occupied by the Foresters. The enemy did not wait for the bayonet, but cleared from the main trench over the sky-line, and as the trenches were retaken, looking along the ridge to the west, it was seen that the East Yorkshires and Durham Light Infantry had advanced from their trenches, but were being driven back by an overwhelming shrapnel and machine-gun fire.

One who was well placed for seeing all that took place writes: "A small number of men, headed by Lieutenants Murray and Whicher, made their way into the trenches, the latter having the satisfaction of bayoneting a German; of poor Murray I cannot speak too highly; he gallantly led his men, taking every advantage of dead ground, and was eventually shot as he was standing up in the trenches shouting to the men behind which way to come up. Ash and Milner also admirably led their men up the valley, but were killed, with most of their fellows, by the deadly machine guns; the advance thus came to an end, the line held being along the bank and so along the edge of the wood.

"'B' and 'D' Companies were coming up—'B' to reinforce 'C' and 'D' to reinforce 'A'; as they advanced Captain Popham was passed sitting in one of the dug-outs, his face streaming with blood, cursing the Germans in his inimitable way and telling the men 'to go for them and give them what for.' 'B' Company, under Captain Way, joined up with the men along the bank, while 'D,' under Major Taylor, moved to the head of the re-entrant, having dropped a platoon under Second-Lieutenant Smith, which moved out to the left.

"A further advance up the valley was attempted by another platoon of 'D' commanded by Lieutenant Bernard, who, although wounded in the arm soon after leaving the bivouac, insisted on carrying on; but again the enemy fire was too heavy, and the platoon was unable to get very far. Thirty-six men of this platoon were killed and wounded, including their commander; he was a great loss to us, had only been with the Battalion a short time, but had endeared himself to everybody and shown what an exceptionally good officer he was.

"It was fortunate that the Germans did not press their advantage on the capture of the trenches and occupy the spur running south from the Chemin des Dames, for a glance at the map will show the vital importance of this hill, which took the whole British line in reverse; and had they had reinforcements available

Digitized by Google

and had run up some guns, the Brigade would have had a very ugly situation to face, for no measures had been taken to secure it, nor was there any reserve remaining."

The officer commanding the Battalion, in sending an account of this day's happenings to the Colonel of the Regiment, wrote as follows: "I need hardly tell you, after what you have heard, that the whole advance was carried through with the greatest dash and resolution, and every officer, non-commissioned officer and man did his job in such a way that nothing better could have been wished for."

For two days the Battalion held the position it had recaptured, being subjected during the hours of daylight to continuous bombardment by German guns of every calibre. The trenches were poor and exposed and, rock being very near the soil-surface, could not be substantially deepened. At last, on the evening of September 22nd, the 2nd Battalion Sherwood Foresters moved back into Brigade reserve at Troyon, on relief by the East Yorkshire Regiment.

Sixty years before to a day this Battalion, then a comparatively newly-raised regiment and known as the 95th or Derbyshire Regiment, had stormed up the slopes of the Alma in its first battle, and had suffered what in those days, before the Great War taught us to reckon our dead by hecatombs, was described as "immense."* By a curious and unusual coincidence, in the very first action in which, on Alma Day, 1914, in France the Battalion was engaged, not only were the losses in officers and men numerically very much the same as on September 20th, 1854, in the Crimea, but the distribution of the casualties in each rank was practically identical. Thus at the Alma the 95th Derbyshire Regiment had 6 officers and 46 other ranks killed, 11 officers and 168 non-commissioned officers and men wounded. At the Chemin des Dames the casualties in the same Battalion were: killed, 4 officers and 44 other ranks; wounded, 8 officers and 165 non-commissioned officers and men. History does, indeed, occasionally repeat itself.

The officers who were killed were: Lieutenants L. A. Bernard, B. C. Ash and P. M. Murray, and Second-Lieutenant R. D. P. Milner; while wounded were Captains C. C. Parkinson, R. S. Popham, G. F. Luther and J. H. Mathias, and Second-Lieutenants R. E. C. Weigall, I. G. Macbean, W. A. W. Crellin and B. G. Allen.

There was renewed fighting during the next four days, and additional casualties: Captain and Adjutant W. R. Frend was killed on the 21st, on the following day Lieutenant H. L. Paddock was wounded, as were, on the 24th, Lieutenant J. MacD. Needham and 11 men. On this day the Battalion withdrew to billets at a village north of the Aisne some two miles east of Troyon, 7 men being wounded on the march thereto by shell-fire. The next three or four days in reserve were chiefly spent in the reorganization made necessary by the casualties sustained; Second-Lieutenant Willcox took over the duties of adjutant; while five non-commissioned officers were promoted to commissioned rank; these were Regimental Sergeant-Major A. Troops, Regimental Quartermaster-Sergeant J. A. Clarke, Company Sergeant-Major G. N. Royce, Sergeants E. E. S. Taylor and W. H. Rees. These were all posted to the Battalion with the exception of

* Lord Raglan's despatch on the Battle of the Alma.

1933824
Digitized by Google

Regimental Quartermaster-Sergeant Clarke, who was gazetted to the Royal Dublin Fusiliers and left the Battalion at Hazebrouck for his new corps. Then on October 7th Lieutenant-Colonel Crofton-Atkins and Captain Way were admitted to hospital, and Major Leveson-Gower took over command of the Battalion. By this time the transfer of the British Expeditionary Force from the Aisne to the left of the line had commenced.

"Towards the close of September Sir John French had suggested to General Joffre the transfer of the British Army to its former place on the left of the line. Other British troops were about to be landed in the north of France; and it was obviously desirable that all the forces of the nation should act in one body. The lines of communication, also, of the British Expeditionary Force would be greatly shortened by its being near the coast. The British . . . were interested above all nations in barring the way to the Channel ports, from which the Germans could threaten the transport of troops from England to France and block the vital avenues of water-borne traffic converging on London. That the Germans had not seized Ostend and Boulogne during their first triumphant advance, when they might easily have done so, had been due to lack of troops; and that omission they were now making every effort to make good. . . .

"Against this movement there were the obvious objections that it must be carried out gradually, so that for a time the British Expeditionary Force would be divided; and that the British, in their journey northward, must move right across the line of the French communications and would necessarily prevent the despatch of French troops to the north for several, it was even said ten, days. General Joffre, however, agreed to Sir John French's proposal; and on the night of the 1st—2nd October was begun the withdrawal of the British troops from the valley of the Aisne. Their movements were carefully concealed; all marches were made by night and the men confined to their billets by day, so that no sign of their departure from the Aisne should be visible to enemy aircraft."*

The IInd Corps moved first, then the 2nd and 1st Cavalry Divisions; and the IIIrd Corps (General Pulteney), composed of the 4th and 6th Divisions, less the 16th Brigade of the latter which remained for a time with the Ist Corps, gave over its trenches to the French on the night of October 6th and began moving off twenty-four hours later. The first part of the journey was made by road, the Battalion marching by moonlight through the Forest of Compiègne. From Compiègne the troops proceeded by train to St. Omer, where, and at Hazebrouck, the IIIrd Corps began detraining and concentrating on October 11th.

The above is the more or less official and epitomized account of the events of the early part of October of this year, and the details may now be filled in so far as they affected the movements of our 2nd Battalion.

During the three or four weeks immediately following upon the action of September 20th, 9 officers and 282 non-commissioned officers and men—the majority of these latter coming from the Army Reserve—had joined the Battalion; the officers were Captains W. H. Wilkin, P. F. R. Anley, G. L. Anson and E. N. Drury-Lowe; Lieutenants C. C. Schneider, R. B. Tower, T. H. Hudson and R. G. S. May, with Second-Lieutenant G. C. R. Martin. On the other hand,

* Official History, vol. I, p. 406.

Digitized by Google

besides the heavy casualties incurred in action on September 20th, there had been other wastage among all ranks, and particularly among senior officers, the commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Crofton-Atkins, as already stated, having been admitted to hospital on October 7th at Rémy, while Major Taylor was also sent down sick to the base much about the same time. The last of the above-mentioned reinforcements appears to have joined the Battalion at Compiègne on October 9th, when the strength was 20 officers and 982 other ranks.*

It was at Compiègne that Brigadier-General Congreve expressed a wish that steps should be taken to render the officers of his units less conspicuous, and accordingly these henceforth wore the same equipment as their men, as had been the custom during the war in South Africa several years previously.

On the evening of October 9th the Battalion entrained and moved by way of Abbeville—where Captain L. B. Chamberlain, formerly of the Regiment, was encountered on the platform disguised as a R.T.O.—and thence by Amiens and Calais to St. Omer, which was reached early on the afternoon of the 10th, and occupied billets at Arques. Next day the 18th Brigade marched to Wardrecques, and there, loading up in some 200 motor lorries, was conveyed to Hazebrouck. On the next morning, about 9 a.m., the Brigade reached the neighbourhood of Vieux Berquin, where touch was established with the enemy and some skirmishing took place, but the Battalion, being this day in Brigade reserve, was not engaged. The Germans, however, exercised on this occasion their usual privilege of shelling the church, on the quite unfounded assumption that the British had a wireless installation in the steeple or the tower.

On October 15th the Battalion formed the advanced guard of the Brigade and marched in the first instance on Steenwerck, close to the Belgian frontier, and where was established the 6th Division headquarters, and here information was to hand that there was a Saxon army corps in front. The German trenches were not far off, and about 600 yards further on the enemy had barricaded the road. The troops now set to work to dig themselves in, to put up trip wires from the barbed wire found lying about, and to place the buildings in the vicinity in a state of defence. Later, however, fresh orders were received and Major Leveson-Gower, calling his company commanders together, made it known that the forward movement would be continued at 7 p.m., when the Battalion was to force the passage of the River Lys at the village of Sailly, holding the further bank while the Engineers made a bridge to replace the one which had been partially destroyed by the enemy. The orders for the Battalion were that "D" Company was to move down on the right of the bridge and "A" on the left, and when these had succeeded in establishing themselves in position, "B" and "C" Companies were to endeavour to cross the river. The company officers were further told that the French cavalry had that afternoon been driven out of Sailly sur Lys, and that a guide from them would be supplied on passing through the hamlet of Petit Mortier.

On this date the officers then with the Battalion appear to have been disposed

* Lieutenant Schneider and 97 other ranks joined on September 27th on the Aisne, Captain Drury-Lowe and 93 more on October 2nd, and Lieutenant Tower with 92 non-commissioned officers and men on the 5th at Jury. The remaining six officers joined on the 9th of the same month at Compiègne.

Digitized by Google

much as follows: Major Leveson-Gower in command; Second-Lieutenant Willcox, adjutant; Captain Tomlinson, quartermaster; Second-Lieutenant Royce, machine-gun officer; and Captain O'Connor, in medical charge.

"*A*" *Company.*—Captain Wilkin; Lieutenant Hudson, 4th Battalion, attached; Second-Lieutenants Rees, Connaught Rangers, attached, and Davey.

"*B*" *Company.*—Lieutenants Schneider and Martin, 3rd Battalion, attached; Second-Lieutenants Taylor and Troops.

"*C*" *Company.*—Captain Anson, 4th Battalion, attached; Lieutenant Edwards; Second-Lieutenants Whicher and Browne.

"*D*" *Company.*—Captains Anley, Reserve of Officers, and Drury-Lowe, 3rd Battalion, attached; Lieutenant May and Second-Lieutenant Smith.

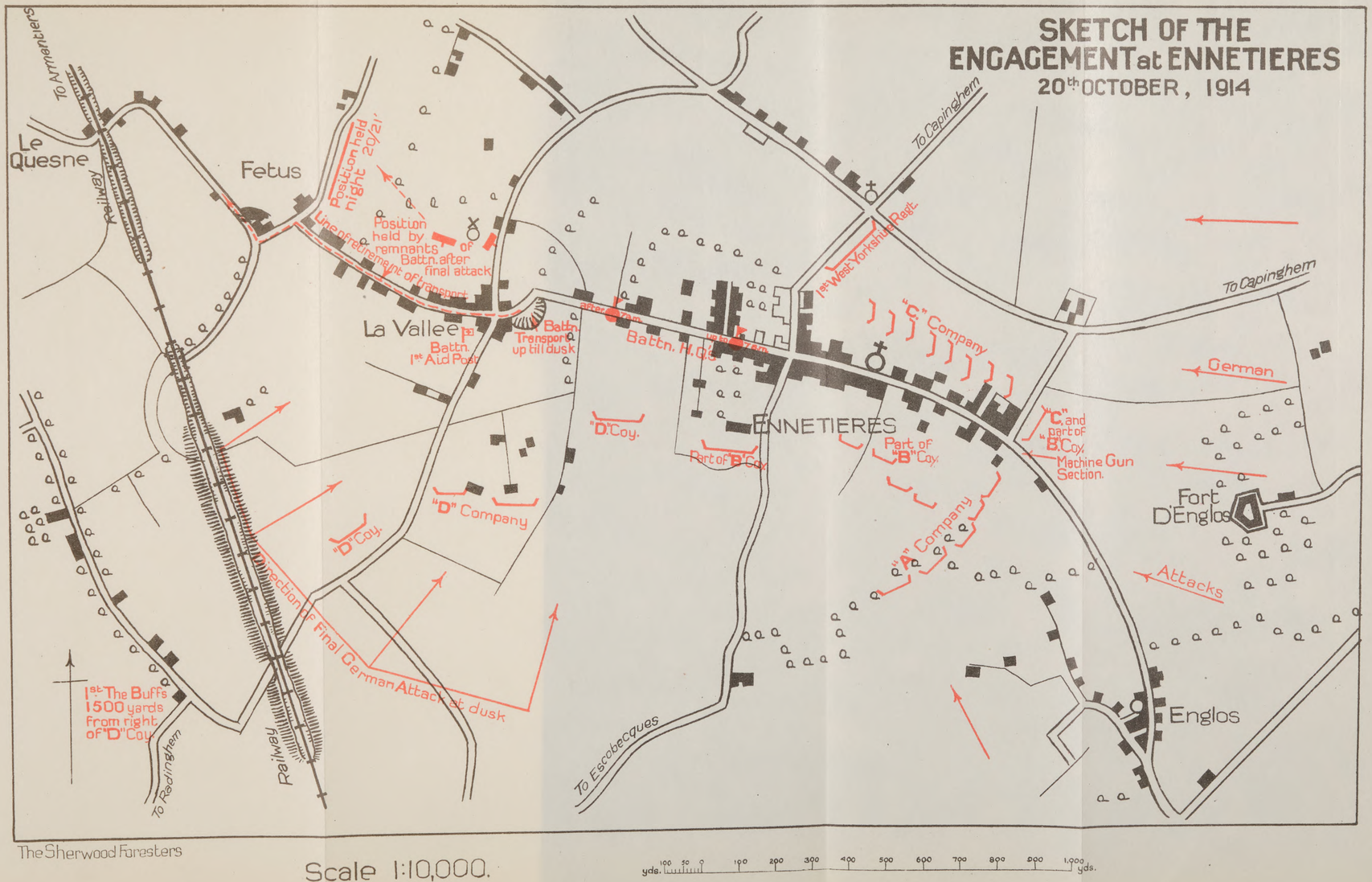
As the companies moved down to the river the village church burst into flames, and there was a smart outburst of firing from the houses; the gaps in the partially-demolished bridge were filled with farm waggons and spanned with ladders, and the companies, crossing rapidly a section at a time, rushed the village and took up a position some 300—400 yards south of the town to cover the crossing. Next day the advance was continued without incident until, on October 17th, the 18th Infantry Brigade approached the ridge west of Lille where the enemy was reported to be entrenched.

By October 18th the whole of General Pulteney's corps was across the Lys and was holding a line from Warneton to Radinghem, but the line was too extended for the number of guns and bayonets at the disposal of the Corps Commander, and as Lord French wrote in his despatch:—"Besides the very undue length of front which the Corps was called upon to cover (some 12 or 13 miles), the position presented many weak spots, and was also astride of the River Lys, the right bank of which, from Frelinghein downwards, was strongly held by the enemy."*

On the evening of this day the Battalion relieved the Durham Light Infantry in the outpost line on the east and south sides of the village of Ennetières, the position occupied being some 2,600 yards in length, situated on a narrow spur running out towards the enemy, the village of Ennetières being on the top of the spur. Both flanks were turned back, thus forming a sharp salient in advance of the line held by the 6th Division. The East Yorkshire battalion of the 18th Infantry Brigade was on the immediate left rear, some 700 yards behind; but on the right there was a gap between the Foresters and the left battalion of the 16th Brigade at Radinghem. The position, in the opinion given later by the divisional commander, was both too exposed and too extended for the force available, but the orders received from the IIIrd Corps were very distinct and definite, viz., that "the 6th Division was to hold on to all it had won with a view to a further advance on the following day," and the position having been taken, the Battalion, on relieving the occupants after dark on the 18th, had no power to alter the alignment of the trenches, still less to take up a fresh position, and the two battalions of the 18th Brigade holding the front line were actually ahead of the battalions of the 17th Brigade on the left and of the 16th on the right. A commencement was at once made in the improvement of the existing trenches with the few tools available, but this very necessary work was seriously hindered and checked by

* Despatch of November 20th, 1914.

Digitized by Google



The Sherwood Foresters

Scale 1:10,000.

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
ASTOR, LENOX
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS

Digitized by Google

a heavy rifle, machine-gun and shell fire which began almost at once and lasted up to 1 a.m. on the 19th, causing several casualties.

On this day also the position was heavily shelled and "sniped," but towards evening the defences were further improved and an attempt was made to dig more trenches and communication trenches, so that when, on the 20th, the German attack developed the men had had no rest for the best part of 48 hours, digging at night and under shell and rifle-fire throughout the hours of daylight. On the morning of October 20th "A" Company (Captain Wilkin) held the point of the salient, with "C" Company (Captain Anson) on the left, and "D" Company (Captain Drury-Lowe*) on the right. Half of "B" Company, under Lieutenant Schneider, was in reserve in the village of Ennetières, while the Machine Gun Section, commanded by Second-Lieutenant Royce, was in position on the Ennetières—Englos road between "A" and "C" Companies. On the night of the 19th—20th the 16th Brigade had a post at the bridge on the railway embankment.

The enemy fire, which had been tolerably persistent throughout the night, developed at daybreak into an organized and heavy bombardment of the village and the hastily constructed defences, and the estaminet occupied by Battalion headquarters appearing to be the special object of the Hun's attentions, it was hurriedly evacuated in favour of the schoolhouse in the same street—only just in time, for the vacated building was now completely demolished by a huge shell, all the Battalion papers being lost, thus making the compilation of an accurate casualty return, after the day's fighting, a work of great difficulty. As the day wore on the German attack along the front became increasingly determined, and the movement of large bodies of the enemy towards the right made the commanding officer, Major Leveson-Gower, very anxious by reason of the gap then existing between the right of the 18th and the left of the 16th Brigade.

About 9.45 an enemy battery opened fire from the south, so that from now onwards the trenches of the Battalion were accurately shelled from north, east and south, and practically every trench was under enfilade fire; half an hour later the last reserves in the hands of the commanding officer had been sent up to the trenches, these being later replaced by a company of the Durham Light Infantry which arrived at the village. The enemy renewed his attacks vigorously at 1 and 3 p.m.; the first of these was driven back with considerable loss, and before the later attack commenced Major Leveson-Gower had sent a written message to Captain Wilkin to commence retiring, and had asked permission of the Brigade to withdraw from the salient and form a line on the high ground just east of the village of La Vallée. This request was, however, refused, and the enemy attack which then developed, and which was covered by heavy field-gun and howitzer fire from north-east of Ennetières, caused many casualties, especially among the officers.

The written message to Captain Wilkin to commence a retirement had been almost immediately cancelled by a verbal one, taken up by the adjutant on receipt of Brigade orders "on no account to withdraw": the adjutant just missed catching the bearer of the written message at the head of the village. Captain Wilkin, on receiving the written message, decided to hold his ground,

* Captain Anley was admitted to hospital on the 18th.

Digitized by Google

and did actually do so for the best part of another hour. Then at exactly 4.40 p.m., finding that the enemy were on three sides of his position from 50 to 150 yards distant, in overwhelming strength, that one of the two maxim guns had been knocked out and the other had only half a belt of ammunition left, while the men had only two or three rounds per rifle and the rifles were so caked with mud that the bolts would not work and in some cases bayonets could not be fixed, orders were given for the men to fall back by platoons to the high ground near the Windmill in La Vallée.

The light was just beginning to fail, and it was impossible to see more than 200 or 300 yards, when it was noticed from Battalion headquarters that a strong German attack, launched by three infantry battalions, was developing from the direction of the railway embankment south-west of La Vallée: this was facilitated by the fact that the 16th Brigade had fallen back from Radinghem unknown to the troops on its left. Every man available, to the number of some fifty, was hastily placed in position on the high ground at La Vallée to cover the retirement of the Battalion transport and a battery of howitzers,* both of which narrowly escaped capture, and to form a rallying point for the companies falling back from the salient. The German oncoming from the rear was so swift, unexpected and overwhelming that there was no time to warn the retiring companies under Captain Wilkin, and these had reached the road near a sandpit in La Vallée and were being hurriedly reformed when the German attack, on reaching La Vallée, swung to the right towards Ennetières and barred the road to safety. Surrounded on all four sides, and ignorant of the whereabouts of the Battalion or Brigade, and realizing that for the Germans to be where they were the troops on both flanks must have gone, there seemed to Captain Wilkin no alternative but surrender, and 10 officers and 484 other ranks of the Battalion finally became prisoners of war, many of these being wounded, the totals including those captured next day with Drury-Lowe, when that officer was completely surrounded, and engaged with the enemy both to front and rear.

At 7.30 p.m. the Germans, coming on again, attacked the remnant of the Battalion—Major Leveson-Gower, Second-Lieutenant Willcox and some 49 non-commissioned officers and men—holding the ridge by the Windmill, and drove them off, but these then prolonged the line north of Fetus, remaining there until finally withdrawn at 5 a.m. on the 21st.

Captain Tomlinson, who was in charge of the transport, was ordered by the commanding officer to return to Fetus with the 1st Line vehicles and officers' chargers at about 5 p.m. or just before dusk, and on the way came under German rifle fire from the Railway, several horses being hit. Later the sergeant-major and several headquarter details with the small arms ammunition pack animals joined him. About midnight Captain O'Connor and the stretcher bearers retired, and the whole party then went on to Bois Grenier with the staff captain and took over billets.

"The Battalion," wrote Brigadier-General Congreve two days later to the Colonel of the Regiment, "had done exceedingly well all day; it was just worn out and overwhelmed by superior numbers." How overwhelmingly superior

* The gunners were helped by some men of the Battalion under Sergeant Rowe who was given the D.C.M. for his good work on this occasion.

Digitized by Google

those numbers actually were did not appear at the time, but they were such as few single battalions were asked to oppose in any of the other actions of the Great War. In a German book* published by the German General Staff it is stated that in the attacks on Ennetières and La Vallée on October 20th, 1914, the 25th German Reserve Division and the 52nd Infantry Brigade were engaged *—that is three-quarters of the German XIXth Corps were opposed to a single British battalion!* This battalion, moreover, was one which had suffered heavily in action only some four weeks previously, and on October 20th not a single company was commanded by the officer who had led it a month previously, while only two of the original platoon commanders were left with their platoons. Further, owing to casualties and promotions, very few of the former platoon sergeants were left, 270 Reservists had joined since September 20th, while of the junior commissioned officers six had just been promoted from the ranks and six more had been attached from the Special Reserve. In spite of all these disadvantages, not one of the trenches held by the 2nd Foresters was taken by direct attack, except some of those on the extreme right which were occupied by platoons out of sight of one another—five of these covering some 1,500 yards of front.

It is very difficult, indeed, practically impossible—accurately to determine the casualties in the Battalion during these forty-eight hours of very hard and continuous fighting, for in the destruction of Battalion headquarters many documents and all the rolls were lost, and reliable casualty returns could not therefore be made up, but the following may be taken as approximately correct: there were 3 officers killed, 3 wounded and 10 captured, while the number of non-commissioned officers and men killed, wounded and missing totalled 710, and of these latter over 100 were brought in wounded, and Captain Wilkin estimated the number of other ranks captured at 484, many of whom were wounded, leaving 126 others killed and wounded. The officers killed were: Captain G. L. Anson, Second-Lieutenants H. L. C. Smith and A. G. Browne; Second-Lieutenants J. D'A. Whicher, E. E. S. Taylor and G. N. Royce were wounded; while the names of those taken prisoner are Captains W. H. Wilkin and E. N. Drury-Lowe, Lieutenants G. D. Edwards, C. C. Schneider, T. H. Hudson and R. G. S. May, Second-Lieutenants A. Troops, T. E. Davey, G. C. R. Martin and W. H. Rees.

Admirable work was done by the medical officer attached to the Battalion, Captain O'Connor,† R.A.M.C. The farm in which his first-aid post was established was very heavily shelled and was hit during the 20th, but he "carried on," and it was owing to the turning movement of the Germans taking place between his aid-post and La Vallée that Captain O'Connor, his staff and patients escaped capture, and that the detachment of the 18th Field Ambulance was able to go forward and evacuate the wounded of the Battalion.

The actual number that returned to Bois Grenier on the 21st with the two remaining officers—Major Leveson-Gower and Second-Lieutenant Willcox—was 49 non-commissioned officers and men only, but the headquarter details, the transport under Captain Tomlinson, the stretcher bearers under Captain

* *Die Schlacten und Gefechte des Grossen Krieges*, p. 52.
† This officer was killed by shell fire on October 25th.

Digitized by Google

O'Connor, and the men who came in later alone or with other units, finally brought the strength up to 253 in "other ranks."

For some three weeks after the events above described the weak state of the Battalion, both in officers and men, served to keep it out of the front line, but owing to the wide front which the 6th Division was required to hold and the repeated enemy attacks, the Battalion—what was left of it—was retained in close support at Bois Grenier.

Reinforcements were early rushed out; on October 26th five officers arrived —Captains C. J. W. Hobbs, E. T. Kingscote (3rd Gloucesters), Second-Lieutenants A. T. Greg, J. T. Benett-Dampier and W. A. F. L. Fox-Pitt (all 3rd Cheshires); and these were followed on the 30th by a draft of 4 officers and 160 non-commissioned officers and men, the names of the officers being Captains H. Edmeades and W. A. Armitage, Lieutenants J. R. Chidlow-Roberts (all of the York and Lancaster Regiment) and N. R. L. Chance (3rd Sherwood Foresters). These raised substantially the strength of the Battalion, and a section of the line about Rue du Bois was handed over to its keeping.

By November 11th the constant attacks directed by the enemy between Ypres and Armentières, and which are generally known as the First Battle of Ypres, came to an end, and the long lines gradually settled down into an uneasy winter torpor. On November 14th a small reinforcement of 40 other ranks reached the Battalion, and a week later a big draft, 550 strong, came out with 6 officers—Major P. M. Dove, Captain C. M. B. Hamilton and Lieutenant D. F. S. Vowler of the Foresters, with Second-Lieutenants W. G. F. Wedderspoon and V. B. Burke (3rd Devons) and R. D. Crosby (3rd Lincolns). It now became possible to reform the four companies, but of the nineteen officers present with the Battalion only eight actually belonged to the Regiment.

The rest of the year was a monotonous time of holding trenches and "resting" in reserve billets. The weather conditions were appalling, for early in November there was a fortnight of frost, followed by a thaw during which the banked-up earth of the trench-parapets simply crumbled away; there were no materials for revetting, and the liquid mud as it accumulated at the bottom of the trenches was merely shovelled out again over the top, forming in time cover of enormous thickness. "Trench stores," as afterwards lavishly supplied, were at this time unknown, sandbags were hard to come by and were issued by the Royal Engineers as men do who part with their dearest possessions. The first wire put out in this section was laid by the Battalion pioneer-sergeant. Trench warfare demanded new weapons, and these—of an amateur kind—early began to be evolved and to make their appearance. The German hand—and rifle—grenade was replied to by the British jampot variety; while the Battalion claims credit for the evolution of the trench periscope, for one of the advanced trenches at Rue du Bois being only some forty yards distant from those of the Saxons, whose sniping proclivities were inconvenient and aggravating, made it necessary for the sentries of the Foresters to be able to keep the proverbial "sharp look-out" without undue exposure. Major Leveson-Gower then caused all the broken looking-glass in the village to be collected and devised the embryo periscope, of which a free and welcome issue was made to the troops, so far as the somewhat restricted supply of looking-glass permitted.

Digitized by Google

At the beginning of December His Majesty the King paid a much-appreciated visit to his soldiers in France, and when, on December 2nd, he inspected the 6th Division, an officer and 8 men represented the Battalion on the occasion.

Half-way through this month there was some likelihood of a fresh outburst of mobile warfare, when the 18th Infantry Brigade was lent to the 4th Division (General H. F. M. Wilson) for an attack which was projected in the neighbourhood of Ploegsteert, and the Battalion went into reserve at Nieppe. The operations commenced on the 19th, but were only partially successful, the sodden condition of the ground making rapid and concerted movement almost impossible. The attack was to have been renewed on the 20th, and "according to plan" the 2nd Battalion Sherwood Foresters crossed the Belgian frontier in support, but before the assembly position was reached word was received that the attack had been abandoned and the troops then resumed their old positions.

More fortunate than some of their comrades, the companies of the Battalion were out of the line on Christmas Day, which was spent in comparative comfort in the Blue Factory at Armentières, all ranks cheered by gracious messages from their King, and confident that on this day above all others they were constantly in the thoughts and prayers of their friends at home.

Digitized by Google

Map 3

CHAPTER II.

JANUARY, 1915—JULY, 1916.

HOOGE—THE YPRES SALIENT.

Battle Honour: "*Hooge*, 1915."

In the closing days of December, 1914, the Battalion was ordered to take over a section of the front at Houplines, and then followed a spell of eighteen solid days in the trenches: during this time it rained almost without ceasing, it was practically impossible to keep the water down in the trenches, and most of them had not less than two feet of water in them. In those early days of the trench-war such luxuries as "Boots, gum, thigh" were quite unknown, and pumps and foot-boards had not then become articles of supply. The cold and wet sent men fast to hospital, and the Battalion may perhaps be regarded as unusually fortunate in that no more than 63 men were admitted to hospital under such terrible conditions.

On January 8th General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien paid a visit to the 2nd Battalion of his Regiment and saw on parade a platoon which happened to be "out" for twenty-four hours' rest. He was much concerned at hearing how long they had been in the trenches and the conditions under which officers and men had been holding the line; and no doubt as a result of the general's representations the length of time passed in the trenches was shortened, and the tour while the Battalion remained in this sector was thereafter fixed at four days in and four days out of the trenches. The time "out" was mostly spent in billets at Armentières.

A small but useful-looking draft—65 strong only—joined this month, this reinforcement nothing like making good the month's wastage; but on the other hand there was a considerable influx of officers—Captain E. R. Street (3rd Battalion), Lieutenants J. I. W. Cowgill (3rd Battalion) and J. H. Slaughter, Second-Lieutenants H. L. Paddock, C. Neville, G. M. Gamble, G. Salmon and W. A. W. Crellin.

Early this year units of the Canadian Expeditionary Force began to arrive at the front, and from February 18th to the end of the month several platoons at a time were attached to the Battalion for instruction, joining that "Brotherhood which binds the brave of all the earth." During March and April there were no events of outstanding importance in which the Foresters took part, though frequent reference is made in the war diary to the heavy firing heard in the distance, for at this time there was much hard fighting in progress at various points on the western front.

At the end of April the Battalion moved to Le Bizet, and was there billeted in Belgium for the first time during the war, and as the month of May approached the Germans became very much more active, while, judging by the shelling to

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

which they treated the British lines, their daily allowance of gun ammunition appeared to have been considerably increased. Near Le Touquet, where the Battalion took over trenches on May 11th, the Germans were especially troublesome, exploding mines several days in succession and causing a good deal of loss to the Foresters. On May 15th Major Dove was shot through the head going round the trenches—a great loss to his comrades of all ranks—and two other officers (Lieutenants Gamble and Selby) and 20 men were this day wounded.

On the following day the Germans put some "heavy stuff" into our trenches and shelled the Battalion lines with big trench-mortar bombs. Later on in the afternoon some of our sappers, in examining a mine, were overcome by the gas, and several men were more or less affected in attempting to get the engineers away. Private Savage, of "D" Company, was foremost in this work of rescue, and at last lost his own life after having gallantly saved several of his comrades. Next day General Congreve inspected "D" Company and congratulated them on their fine work.

The first of the Service battalions were now beginning to make their appearance at the front, and platoons of these were attached for duty, while personally-conducted tours of the trenches were arranged for parties of their officers.

On May 25th there is almost a querulous note in the Battalion diary:—"Everybody seemed to be shooting last night, and our sleep was much disturbed," so runs the plaint!

The Division was now ordered to be ready for a move within the next few days, and the 18th Brigade was to have a new Brigadier, since General Congreve, who had ever been a very good friend to the Battalion, was promoted to command the Division in the place of General Sir John Keir, who had been given command of the newly-formed VIth Corps. General Congreve's place at the head of the 18th Infantry Brigade was taken by Brigadier-General H. S. Ainslie, C.M.G. To Lieutenant-Colonel Leveson-Gower, General Congreve wrote:—

"Many thanks to you and your Battalion for your kind congratulations on my appointment to command the 6th Division. I fully realize how much I owe it to the good work of the Brigade, and will you give my warm thanks to all your Battalion and say good-bye to them for me. I am so glad to think I am not going altogether out of touch with you. Adieu."

On the 28th the Sherwood Foresters were relieved in the trenches on either side of the River Lys by the Royal Irish Regiment and Royal Irish Fusiliers, of the 27th Division, and left Pont de Nieppe that night to join the VIth Corps in the Ypres Salient, marching by Bailleul and Poperinghe and reaching the hutments about 1½ miles north-west of Ypres on the evening of May 31st, being here in Divisional Reserve. Near Bailleul the Brigade was inspected by Field-Marshal Sir John French, who thanked all ranks for the good service they had rendered since the arrival of the 18th Brigade in France. The evil reputation of Ypres for gas attacks had already reached the 2nd Battalion Sherwood Foresters, and steps had been taken regimentally to make up a very primitive form of respirator for protection against the German gas; but as the Battalion drew near Ypres an improved pattern of respirator was received from

Digitized by Google

the Ordnance Department, and these were served out during the halts by the road-side.

In the "Bloody Salient" the Foresters were to remain for well over a year —"to the end of July, 1916, with three periods of rest each of about a month's duration; the first spent in the neighbourhood of Houtkerque and Poperinghe in November and December, 1915; the second in the Houtkerque—Wormhoudt area with a brigade at a time back at Calais from mid-March to mid-April, 1916; and the third again in the Houtkerque—Wormhoudt area from mid-June to mid-July, 1916."*

About June 5th the Battalion took over trenches in front of Potijze, the ground being part of that newly trenched since the recent close of the Battle of Ypres, and the condition of these modest excavations is during the next few days the subject of severe comment in the Battalion war diary. "The relieved regiments," we read, "don't appear to have done much work. No communication trenches even between the two companies in the front line, and 'C' Company has a post 150 yards in front of the main line which is absolutely isolated by day." Later on occurs the entry: "This Brigade seems to be the only one that takes the trouble to dig communication trenches. Whenever we move to a new piece of line we have to start digging them!"

Curiously enough, a careful study of the war diaries of different battalions of the Expeditionary Force reveals similar plaints in each one of them: every unit writes, more in sorrow than in anger, of the indifferent spade work put in by its predecessors in the line, none of which seem to have known even the rudiments of the art of the military navvy; and when one remembers that the Allied trench line did indeed extend from the Channel to the Swiss frontier, one is led to believe that these trenches, like the public buildings in Eden City, "must have grown spontaneous!"

Even trench life seems at this period to have had its alleviations: for cows were found mysteriously and obligingly wandering about between the 1st and 2nd line of trenches in the Battalion area, and the diary lightheartedly narrates that a dairy farm was established at Battalion headquarters: there is, however, no mention of dairymaids!

In the last week in June the 2nd Foresters moved to a new area, taking over trenches in the St. Jean sector from a battalion of the 17th Brigade, and as a result "A" Company now held the village of Wieltje, with "C" Company in rear on the right of the road, "B" Company in the centre and "D" on the left. On the right of the Battalion was the 16th Brigade, while on the left were the Queen's Westminsters. "The trenches are pretty good," the diary grudgingly remarks, "but there is a lot of work to be done on the communication trenches."

During June 4 officers and 35 other ranks joined for duty, the officers being Second-Lieutenants J. E. Wright, A. S. Edwards, W. S. Holden and J. W. C. Taylor.

On almost every day during July the diary announces that matters are generally quiet, but none the less there was a certain amount of shelling, and occasionally the shells sent over were of the gas variety, but the casualties, happily, were light.

* *A Short History of the Sixth Division*, p. 13.

Digitized by Google

"On the 30th July the 14th Division was attacked at Hooge and driven back to Sanctuary and Zouave Woods. Their counter-attacks, gallantly delivered, but under the circumstances giving little prospect of success, failed, and for a time the situation was critical. The 16th Infantry Brigade was moved up to the area about Goldfish Château (half a mile north-west of Ypres) as a precautionary measure, and was at one time in danger of being thrown in to make a hasty counter-attack. Fortunately this proved unnecessary, and on the 31st July the Corps Commander decided to relieve the whole 6th Division, and to allot to it the task of restoring the line at Hooge in a carefully-prepared attack."*

The relief of the 6th Division was carried out on August 2nd and 3rd, the 9th Brigade taking the place of the 18th, now again at Potijze, and the Northumberland Fusiliers relieving the Sherwood Foresters, the companies of which marched to Poperinghe, where they went into billets near the railway station prior to moving to Hooge. Poperinghe was left early in the afternoon of August 5th, but it seems that the Germans must have noticed the movement of troops on the Ypres road, for while the Battalion was halted between 5 p.m. and 9.30 the halting place was shelled, one of the Regiment being killed and 12 wounded—among the latter being the commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Leveson-Gower, whose place was then taken by Major C. Hobbs. Maple Copse was reached at 2 a.m. on the 6th, the dug-outs to be here occupied being taken over from the 6th Battalion Sherwood Foresters.

On this day the 6th Division "took over its front of attack, and the preparatory bombardment was commenced. This bombardment was very carefully planned and carried out with great thoroughness and accuracy, and was one of the most effective and severe that had, up to that time, been put down by the British."†

The orders for the attack by the 18th Brigade, of which Lieutenant-Colonel Towsey, of the West Yorkshire Regiment, was at this time in temporary command, directed that the object of the operations to be undertaken by the Division was the securing of the high ground north of the Crater and in the direction of Q.19 and P.7, immediately south of Eclusette, and the establishment of the Division on a line through the Stables and Q.14 towards Q.19. The number of men engaged in the front line was to be reduced to a minimum and the important points were to be held with machine guns. The 18th Infantry Brigade on the right was to attack from Sanctuary Wood with its right on G.1, G.2 and G.3, and its left on the Strand, the right flank being protected by troops of the 46th Division and by the artillery, but any counter-attack from the direction of Q.8 was to be guarded against by the occupation and wiring of G.2 and G.3. The first objective of this attack was the establishment of a line continuing G.3 across the Menin Road, north of the houses, to the Crater inclusive.

The Brigade was distributed as follows: the Durham Light Infantry, leading the assault, was to assemble in the northern portion of Sanctuary Wood; the Foresters, in support of the Durhams, were to assemble in rear of that regiment; the East Yorks were to remain in occupation of Zouave Wood; the

* *A Short History of the Sixth Division*, p. 14.
† *Ibid.*

Digitized by Google

Queen's Westminsters were to be held in reserve; while the West Yorkshire Regiment was to remain in the ramparts in Ypres.

From 2.45 to 3.15 a.m. there was to be a bombardment of the enemy defences, under cover of which the infantry detailed for the assault was to deploy, advance as far as possible and then lie down, advancing again rapidly so soon as the guns should lift at 3.15. The following orders for the attack were issued to the companies of the Battalion :—

"*Prior to the attack.*—'B' Company (Captain Chatteris) will occupy G.1, to be in position by 10 p.m. on the 8th August. 'C' Company (Captain Tower) will occupy B.8 (held by a company of the 8th Sherwood Foresters) to be in position by 2 a.m. on the 9th. 'A' Company (Captain Crosby) will occupy the forward trench, now held by the Durham Light Infantry, to be in position by 2.30 or as soon as the Durham Light Infantry have vacated it. 'D' Company (Lieutenant Ridley) will occupy the support trench held by the Durham Light Infantry, to be in position by 2.30 or as soon after as the Durham Light Infantry have vacated it.

"*The Attack.*—At 3.15 a.m. on the 9th 'B' Company, in following order—

Bombing party of 12 men, under company bombing-sergeant;
1 platoon;
Bombing party of 12 men, under company bombing-sergeant;
3 platoons;

followed by a machine gun detachment of 'C' Company in the same order as 'B,' will advance up G.1, 2 and 3 as far and as rapidly as possible. At the same time 'A' Company will send one platoon up S.1 and one platoon up S.2, who will advance up these trenches as far and as rapidly as possible. The remaining two platoons of 'A' Company will close in to their right and follow the leading platoons up S.1 and S.2 as soon as there is room for them.

"'D' Company will move up into the trench vacated by 'A' Company, closing to their right as opportunity occurs. All the bombers of 'D' Company will be on the right of their line with their bombs.

"The machine gun detachment in rear of 'B' Company will establish an emplacement at the junction of G.1 and G.2 and come into action there as soon as possible, ready to resist an attack. One machine gun will be established in the sap-head at the southern end of G.1. Two machine guns will be held in reserve at junction of B.8 and our original forward trench.

"*Wiring Parties.*—Officer commanding 'D' Company will detail two parties of 15 and 25 men respectively, under a reliable non-commissioned officer, to improve the wire entanglements in front of G.1, 2 and 3. These parties will be under the orders of Lieutenant Gamage, R.E., to whom non-commissioned officers in charge of parties will report at the southern end of G.1 at a time to be notified later. . . .

"'B' and 'C' Companies will be equipped as follows: 200 rounds ammunition and four sandbags per man, with one shovel to every two men. 'A' and 'D' Companies will carry 200 rounds of ammunition, four sandbags and one shovel per man. . . ."

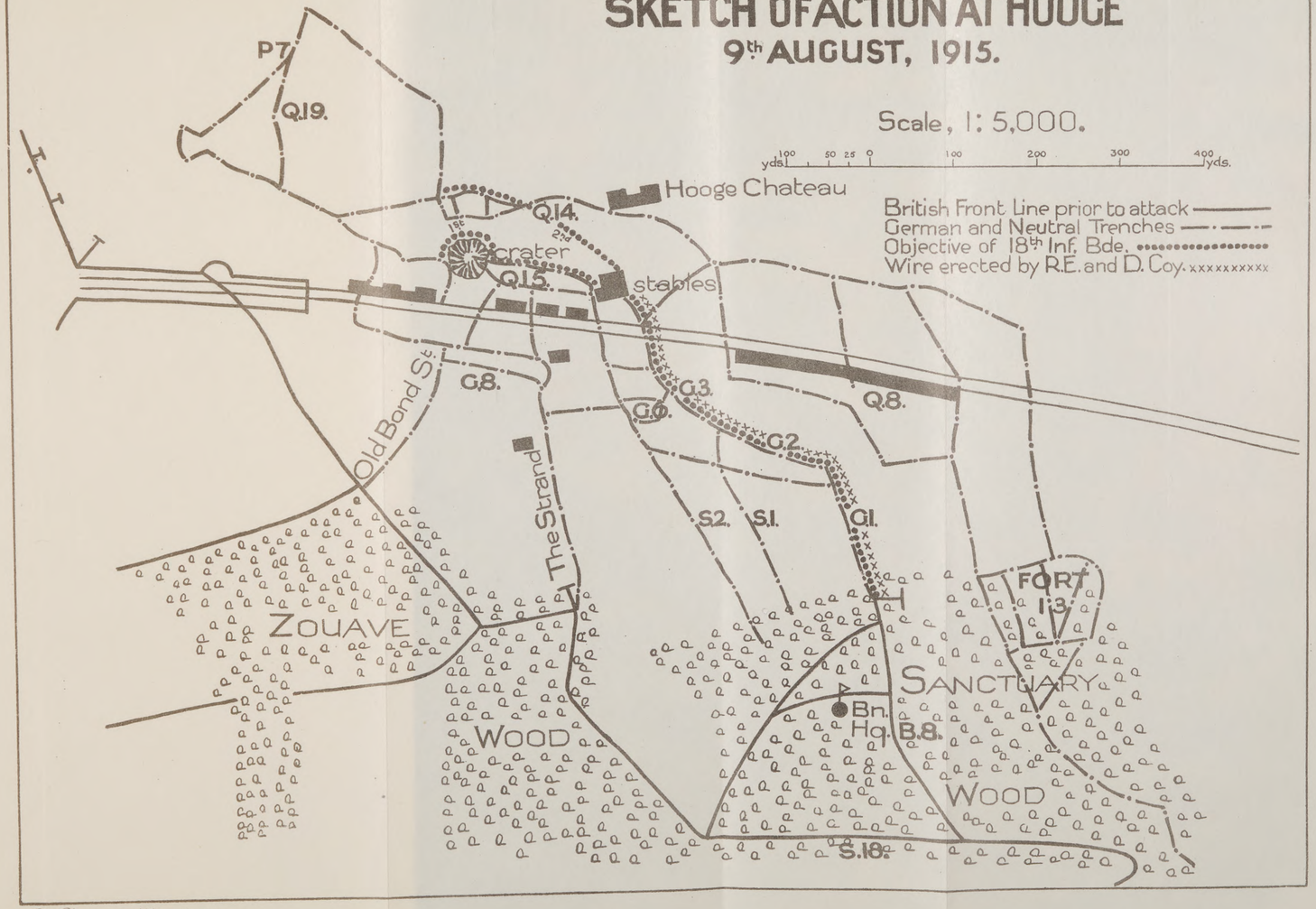
The strength of the 2nd Battalion Sherwood Foresters this day, August 8th, was 24 officers and 965 other ranks.

Digitized by Google

SKETCH OF ACTION AT HOOGE
9th AUGUST, 1915.

Scale, 1: 5,000.

100 50 25 0 100 200 300 400 yds.



The Sherwood Foresters

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
ASTOR, LENOX
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS

Digitized by Google

By 1.45 a.m. the Battalion was clear of Maple Copse and by 2.30 was in position in Sanctuary Wood; at 3.30 the advance commenced, "B" and "C" Companies, under Captains Chatteris and Tower, proceeding up G.1 and G.2 respectively, headed by a strong bombing party. The first opposition was encountered about fifty yards east of the junction of G.1 and G.2, but this was quickly overcome by our bombers; at the same time two platoons of "A" Company pushed up S.2 and S.1, but the former trench was found to be practically useless as a communication trench, as it afforded very little cover and was half full of water and dead men. By this time the German artillery was shelling the trenches very heavily and persistently, and their fire was particularly accurate.

At 3.45 a.m. a report came in that the Durham Light Infantry had captured the trenches which were their objective, and shortly after "B" Company sent back a message that they had gained touch with the right of the assaulting line. By this the rear of "C" Company was well up G.1, so three platoons of the supporting company—"D"—under Lieutenant Roberts, were sent up G.1 to fill the gap between "C" Company and the 8th Battalion Sherwood Foresters, while a machine gun was also moved forward to the junction of G.1 and 2.

By 5 a.m. the German guns were in full blast, and the trenches occupied by the Foresters, especially G.2 and G.3, were being blown in in all directions, cutting communications between "B" and "C" Companies. At 5.30 "A" Company of the Battalion had been called upon to reinforce the Durhams, and some of that company had established themselves in G.6. The casualties among officers in G.3 had been heavy, as also among the companies of the leading battalion, and Lieutenant Taylor was sent from "B" Company to help the Durham Light Infantry at the Crater. At midday the men were holding on to the trenches in isolated groups where any cover remained, communication was very difficult, and a hail of shells, large and small, was falling on G.1, 2, 3 and 6. No telephone wire could be maintained intact for more than a very few minutes, and messages between companies and Battalion headquarters had to be sent by runners, and the bravery and devotion of these men was throughout deserving of the very highest praise. Private Jones, of "A" Company, carried messages all day under a hail of shells, and his endurance and disregard of danger were equally wonderful; another runner who won great praise was Drummer Bentley, also of "A" Company and little more than a boy, whose gallantry on this day won him the Distinguished Conduct Medal; the medal was also awarded to Private Jones.

Towards the afternoon the difficulty of dispatching reinforcements to the front was found to be almost insuperable, and no more were sent, while later still, G.1 being found to be rather overcrowded, two platoons were moved to hold the Durhams' original fire-trench with two platoons of the Queen's Westminsters, while G.1 was organized for defence from a point fifty yards north of the sap, where a machine gun to sweep and enfilade the front was established. The Germans showed no inclination to counter-attack, but when, after dark, Captain Crosby and some 30 other ranks rejoined the Battalion from G.3 and G.6, these proved to be the only survivors of the original garrison.

About 9.30 p.m. the Battalion was relieved by the Queen's Westminsters

Digitized by Google

and proceeded to dug-outs in the ramparts of Ypres. The long day's fighting and the heavy shelling had caused great loss to the Battalion, the casualties in which amounted to 9 officers and 105 other ranks killed or died of wounds, 5 officers and 222 non-commissioned officers and men wounded. The officers who fell were Captain T. B. Chatteris, Lieutenants G. P. Walsh, G. M. Hoyle and J. W. C. Taylor, Second-Lieutenants W. H. Cooke, H. Ridley, G. A. Kay and M. V. Molloy, while the names of the wounded officers were Captain E. R. Street, Lieutenant G. M. Gleave, Second-Lieutenants R. Palmer (died of wounds), M. L. Benford, H. Carter and J. E. Wright.

"The attack at Hooge was particularly interesting," wrote the later commander of the 6th Division, "as it was the first attempt made to follow the barrage really closely. The barrage did not, however, creep up to the German front line, but was placed directly on it at once at zero and lifted back from there, the 6-in. howitzers lifting slightly before the field artillery. The infantry lay out as close to the barrage as possible before zero, and moved in *on time* as soon as the field artillery barrage lifted. The attack was looked upon for some time as a model of really close co-operation between infantry and artillery."

In this action also the steel helmet was introduced for purposes of trial and report, twelve of these "tin hats" being issued to the Battalion. They were worn by men of "A" Company, and proved a great protection, and were consequently very favourably reported on.

The Brigadier (Colonel Towsey), Sir John Keir (the Corps Commander), and Sir Herbert Plumer (Commanding the Second Army) took early opportunities of seeing the Battalion on parade and expressing their high appreciation of the excellent services rendered on August 9th.

Within ten days of the action two strong drafts joined for duty, one of 113 and another of 250 other ranks, with the result that the Battalion, while still very short of officers, was 64 over strength in respect of non-commissioned officers and men; but on the 22nd three young officers joined—Second-Lieutenants Sharp, Martin and Glen, and next day two more—Lieutenants Hancock and March, the Battalion now containing 17 officers and 1,060 other ranks. Then just before the end of August two more officers arrived, Lieutenant R. G. Milward from the 4th Battalion, and Second-Lieutenant H. T. Barratt from St. Omer.

September was a tolerably quiet month, and as more drafts and officers came out and the casualties were low, the Battalion was at the end of the month probably as strong as at any period of the war. With the commencement of October the enemy began to display an increased activity, and on the 5th, when occupying trenches in the Potijze sector, the Battalion advance post, known as Oder Houses, was rushed by the enemy about 6.30 in the morning. The Germans at first opened a heavy artillery and trench mortar fire on Oder Houses, and on the main fire-trenches occupied by "A" and "B" Companies in rear of the post. The front trench and two cottages in rear were flattened out by the enemy's artillery, and what remained of the garrison withdrew down the communication trenches towards the main line. Captain Roberts, commanding "B" Company, from which the garrison of the post was drawn, arranged for a counter-attack up the two communication trenches leading to the post, while

Digitized by Google

[Photo, Imperial War Museum.

PANORAMIC VIEW OF YPRES, OCTOBER 1ST, 1917.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

the so-called "Toby" mortars were laid on the front of the post. A patrol was first sent forward to ascertain the exact position of the enemy, but these, on seeing the advance of the patrol, at once retreated and the post was reoccupied. The casualties were rather severe, "B" Company having 11 killed, 19 wounded —mostly by shell-fire—1 man missing, believed killed, and 1 wounded and missing, believed captured.

During this month several detachments of newly-arrived Service battalions were attached for instruction to the 2nd Foresters.

"We don't get much rest these days," is a remark in the war diary during this month, and there is substantial foundation for the statement; every few days up the line in either the Wieltje or Potijze sectors, subjected to constant shelling, even if, as on one day it is cheerfully admitted, by "only a few whizzbangs," and these varied by brief times of "rest" in the dug-outs on the Yser Canal bank just north of Ypres or Poperinghe, where almost every night all available men were sent on fatigue up to the line, and the back areas and roads were heavily shelled by the enemy during the hours of darkness.

On October 24th orders were received that the Battalion was to be transferred from the 18th to the 71st Infantry Brigade, which, commanded by Brigadier-General M. Shewen, was to take the place of the 17th Brigade, transferred to the 24th Division. This necessitated a redistribution of battalions to brigades, and the 71st Brigade was now composed of the 9th Battalion Norfolk Regiment, 9th Battalion Suffolk Regiment, 1st Battalion Leicestershire Regiment and the 2nd Battalion Sherwood Foresters. This change, so far as the 2nd Battalion Sherwood Foresters was concerned, was completed by October 28th, and by the end of the first week in November the distribution of the Battalion was as follows: one platoon of "B" Company in La Brique, two platoons on the Canal bank and one platoon in dug-outs in H.11; "D" Company and Headquarters in H.11, "A" Company in Machine Gun Farm, and "C" Company in C Camp A.30.

On November 12th the Battalion occupied the Cross Roads Farm sector (La Brique) and the trenches here were in a truly appalling state, the disease known as "trench feet" made its appearance, and there were some 55 men admitted to hospital. A note in the diary says: "it is wonderful how the men stick it."

On November 14th Major-General C. Ross, D.S.O., assumed command of the 6th Division on the appointment of Major-General W. N. Congreve, V.C., to command the XIIIth Corps; and on the 26th the Battalion moved from billets at Poperinghe to the grounds of Elverdinghe Château, being there temporarily attached to the 147th Brigade of the 49th Division, returning on the 30th to Poperinghe.

On December 13th orders were received that the Battalion was next day to commence a fresh tour in the Wieltje sector, and in accordance with the usual practice the commanding officer, adjutant and the four company commanders set out in the afternoon to inspect the trenches to be taken over and to arrange the relief; the party had got safely through Ypres and was moving along the St. Jean road when a shell burst among them, wounding four out of the six—Lieutenants Willcox, Whicher and Hancock, and Second-Lieutenant Fletcher.

Digitized by Google

Lieutenant Whicher had only rejoined just a week previously on recovery from the wound he received at Ennetières. The Battalion at this time was well enough off for officers so far as numbers went, the last return showing 29 as being present, but many of these were very young, and experienced officers could ill be spared. The duties of adjutant were now taken over by Second-Lieutenant F. E. Jones.

The weather was still very wet and the trenches flooded, with the parapets constantly falling in; while up in the line the men were perpetually under shell-fire, most of it being "heavy stuff," and even when at rest there were constant fatigues, varied by "alarms and excursions" which shortened the rest-period to which all looked forward on return to billets. Thus on the 19th the Battalion was only just back from a tour in the trenches when it was suddenly ordered to "stand to" about 5 a.m., and then directed to march to the Canal bank, consequent on a German gas attack on the divisional front. British artillery opened a very heavy fire on the German lines, and about 7 a.m. the Battalion moved off by the Poperinghe—Vlamertinghe—Ypres main road, one man being severely wounded by the shells which followed the column while passing through Vlamertinghe; gas was noticed here also. As the enemy attack did not seem likely to materialize, "C" and "D" Companies returned whence they came, while "A" and "B" went into dug-outs for a time under Major Street, and then rejoined the remainder of the Battalion about 7 p.m. The guns on both sides opened again at 8 o'clock, and the Battalion was ordered to be ready to move at a moment's notice; Poperinghe attracted some heavy German shells, and two men of the Foresters were wounded during the night.

Christmas Day, 1915, was passed in the trenches in the usual discomfort, and the celebration of the festival was postponed until all ranks were in billets again at Poperinghe on the 27th, to find that a draft of 120 other ranks had arrived, and that many presents had been sent out to the Battalion by kind people at home.

In the beginning of 1916, while the Battalion remained in the Salient, the condition of the trenches became rather better, owing to some improvement in the weather and the amount of digging and draining work carried out; on January 4th there is almost a jubilant note in the diary: "the camp," we read, "has greatly improved, it is now possible to walk about on boards without getting mud up to one's knees!" Such shelling as the enemy indulged in happily did not come much in the way of the Foresters, and though there was a certain amount of sickness, actual casualties were few. Several small drafts joined—30 men on New Year's Day, 28 on January 9th, 58 on the 15th and 10 on the 27th, while during the same period the following officers were posted for duty, viz.: Lieutenants A. J. M. Lander, A. A. Nelson and O. Foster, Second-Lieutenants R. Page and E. Brown.

The comparatively inactive life led by the battalions of the 6th Division occupying the Ypres Salient did not, as might have been expected, lead to any slackening of effort by officers and men, as may be seen by the following report on a patrol carried out on the morning of February 20th by two men of "B" Company of the Battalion:—

"At 6 a.m. the patrol went out in the mist from the left of A.8, returning

Digitized by Google

the same way at 6.55 a.m. The patrol was composed of No. 12191 Private S. Taylor and 14137 Private W. Holmes, both of whom had been on previous patrols in front of A.8. They made their way to the wire at the point of the salient, and, not being challenged, advanced through pathways already made in the wire on to the parapet. They could see for about thirty yards, and the salient appeared to be uninhabited. On the north side, behind the parapet, was an iron pipe about six inches in diameter running to the head of the salient, from which point a communication trench had been dug leading to a short trench about twelve yards long, which was some twenty yards in front of the enemy wire. This trench, and the communicating trench, appeared to have been recently dug, the earth having been scattered over the ground so as not to show, and the trenches being about two feet wide and eighteen inches deep. There were no signs of mining. The patrol brought back with them two German entrenching shovels and one ordinary shovel."

In forwarding this report the Brigadier wrote: "Reference attached, I would like to bring to the notice of the G.O.C. 6th Division the very good patrol work carried out by the 2nd Sherwood Foresters during their present period of duty in the trenches." The reply from the Division ran as follows: "The G.O.C. wishes me to say that he is much pleased with the recent patrolling which has been carried out on the front of the Division, especially with regard to patrols of the 2nd Sherwood Foresters."

The following non-commissioned officers and men of the Battalion were mentioned by the Brigadier as "deserving of special mention for their coolness and resourcefulness and the intrepidity with which they carried out their arduous duty": No. 10405 Sergeant Grundy, No. 6540 Private Mann, No. 11904 Private Redfern, No. 12191 Private Taylor and No. 14137 Private Holmes.

The admirable result of the above-noticed patrolling was in a great measure due to the efforts of Lieutenant Kaine, who for some years prior to the war had lived amongst the Sioux Indians in America, and who joined the Battalion early this year.

The good work done at this time was not confined to the men holding the front line: something must be said of the devotion of the men of the Battalion transport, who never failed night after night to take up rations and supplies to their comrades in the trenches, along the shell-swept roads—nine miles of them—through Vlamertinghe and Ypres, suffering casualties in men and animals.

During this month the 14th Service Battalion—especially rich in subalterns—had sent three young officers to the 2nd: these were Lieutenant C. N. Jones and Second-Lieutenants R. D. North and R. W. Fellowes.

Up to the middle of March the Battalion, since trench warfare commenced, had never been out of the line for any longer period than the usual week or ten days in Brigade Reserve, but now, from certain signs and portents, there seemed some likelihood of a time of real rest, and even relaxation, being in store for officers and men. All, however, were determined to go on pressing the Hun and making his life a burden to him up to the very last available moment. Thus the diary records, under date of March 11th: "our listening post on the left of Wieltje bombed a German patrol; the Germans left in a hurry, leaving behind them two helmets, two rifles and several bombs." Again, two days later: "Second-

Digitized by Google

Lieutenant Sharpe and four men went through a gap in the enemy's line at the point of their salient and threw twelve bombs into the trench. They all returned safely to our lines. 'D' Company sent out a sergeant and five men to investigate Argyll Farm, about seventy yards in front of our trench on the Fortuin road; they surprised a party of five Germans, who bolted hurriedly through the mist. A search of the house revealed a telephone, helmet, a rifle and set of equipment, all of which were brought back to our lines."

However, there was to be a temporary cessation of these amenities, and on the 17th the 2nd Sherwood Foresters were relieved by the 3rd Battalion Coldstream Guards, and the Foresters started that evening by train for Poperinghe, which was again left by march route early on the 18th and, moving by Herzeele, they arrived at Wormhoudt on the morning of the 19th and went into tolerably comfortable billets. The Battalion was now for some thirty days practically out of the war—away even from the sound of guns; half this time was spent near Wormhoudt and the rest of the period in or near Calais, whither the Foresters moved on April 6th to a camp two miles east of the town. While thus out of the line at rest two officers were taken from the Battalion for the Staff, Captain and Adjutant H. B. D. Willcox going to the 49th Infantry Brigade as staff captain, and Captain R. B. Tower in a similar capacity to the 16th Infantry Brigade.

During April Lieutenant G. S. Taylor was posted to the Battalion. This officer had been gazetted to the A.S.C. in the previous October, but finding that his departmental duties afforded him insufficient scope for the destruction of Huns, he applied for transfer to the infantry and joined the Battalion for duty in the front line—his fighting kit consisting of two blankets and a mandolin! Thus equipped and armed he did excellent work for his new corps, and the "weapon" with which he came armed effectually livened up "A" Company during many dreary tours of duty in the trenches!

The Battalion holiday came all too soon to an end, and on the 15th the Foresters left Calais for the Salient, marching by Zutkerque, Merckeghem and Wormhoudt, and finding themselves back again in the Canal bank dug-outs at the end of April and providing the usual large fatigue parties when out of the line.

The only event of any importance that took place in May was the relief in command of the 71st Infantry Brigade of Brigadier-General M. T. Shewen by Brigadier-General J. F. Edwards. The former, on leaving, sent the following very cordial letter of farewell to the Commanding Officer:—

"*26th May*, 1916.

"*My dear Hobbs,*

"*Farewell orders are out of place at this time, but I should feel grateful to you if you would let your officers, non-commissioned officers and men know that since they came into my brigade I have always looked upon them all as my most trusted comrades and my best friends.*

"*I shall let the people at home know of them, their devotion to duty and to their country; you may remember that a high authority—the Commander-in-Chief—said it was a splendid brigade. The Sherwood Foresters have contributed in no small measure to make it so.*

Digitized by Google

[*Photo, Imperial War Museum.*

A LINE OF GERMAN STRONG POSTS, NEAR ST. JULIEN.

[*Photo, Imperial War Museum.*

VLAMERTINGHE.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

"I feel bitterly leaving such fine soldiers and good comrades.
"Wishing you all the best of luck.
"Yours very sincerely,
"MANSEL SHEWEN."

During June the Battalion reverted to the old methods in vogue before it had left for its rest, trench duty, heavy fatigues, while the inspections by higher authority which now took place provided some foundation for the belief, which had become general, that the time was approaching when the Regiment would leave the Salient and play its part in some of the great actions which had been taking place on other parts of the western front, or in some of those greater battles without which all realized that the long war could not be brought to a victorious end. The Battalion at the end of the month was not only very strong in men and officers, but it was a tried and war-worthy weapon; during June 2 officers—Captain Griffiths and Lieutenant Cowgill—had been wounded, but 11 officers had joined—Captain Munro-Faure, Lieutenants G. W. Frost and R. M. Drynan, Second-Lieutenants F. J. Mellors, E. H. Wilson, V. Jackson, H. B. Byles, W. H. Davis, S. W. Moult, J. C. M. Runtz and K. Grounds—and on the last day of the month the old Ninety-Fifth contained 35 officers and 1,057 non-commissioned officers and men; so that it must have presented a fine appearance when, on the 22nd, it paraded under Major Street, D.S.O., for inspection by the Corps Commander, Lieutenant-General the Earl of Cavan, who, after a very searching inspection, addressed the Battalion in words of which all who have ever served in it may well be proud:—

"General Edwards, Major Street, Officers and Men of the Sherwood Foresters:

"I am very pleased with everything I have seen this morning, you have made a very good turn-out.

"I am very proud to have inspected one of the oldest Regiments in England; I need not speak of the history of the Regiment before the war, but since you came out, on the Aisne and elsewhere, you have always done that which was asked of you, and those of you who came out at the beginning and were at Ennetières know more about what you have done than I do.

"While you have been in the XIVth Corps no regiment in the Division or in the Corps has sent me better information about the Germans, their trenches, and the state of their wire than you have done, and I am much obliged to you.

"I know it is hard for those who have been a long time in the trenches to smarten themselves up at such short notice for a General's inspection, but I am very pleased with your turn-out.

"Now about the future. The Russians are doing well against the Austrians, the French are doing well against the Germans, and it is up to us Britishers to do better, and it will not be long before you are called upon to do so; and I can promise you that I shall not launch infantry against an unbroken line of German trenches, and I can assure you that before you move to attack we will have a bombardment by more guns than have ever been seen up here before.

"So I want you all to get strong, and I know that you will do then as well as you have always done before."

Digitized by Google

During the early part of July the Brigade was in the training area at Bollezeele, and while there the adjutant, Lieutenant F. E. Jones, who had been appointed on Captain Willcox leaving for the Staff, was sent to Oulchy le Château to fetch the drums and fifes of the Battalion, which had been handed over to the care of the Mayor soon after arrival in France, and faithfully cared for by him. By the end of July the 2nd Sherwood Foresters were back again about St. Jean and the Wieltje area, but it was very evident that every soldier who could be spared would be needed to play his part in the great battles now opening on the River Somme; the time for the Battalion to be employed was, however, not yet come, and some weeks were still to elapse before its services were to be called for.

On August 2nd the Division began to leave "the Bloody Salient," where during its thirteen months' sojourn the units composing it had sustained some 11,000 casualties, though it had taken part in no general action, and proceeded south to join the Fifth Army. On the evening of the 2nd, then, the Sherwood Foresters marched to Proven, and leaving there by train soon after midnight, arrived at Condas about 10 a.m. on the 3rd and, detraining, had a short but very hot march of five miles to Beauval, and thence by way of Lealvillers, Varennes and Hedauville to Mailly-Maillet Wood, near which the Battalion halted on the 5th for dinners, leaving afterwards to relieve a battalion of the 25th Division in trenches west of Beaumont Hamel. It was a novel experience, coming from the Salient, to be able to take over trenches during daylight, more novel still to find them "in quite good condition, except for the great number of British dead still lying unburied both in front and in rear of the British trenches," and to these the Sherwood Foresters at once made it their business to give decent sepulchre.

About this time His Majesty the King had just concluded one of his much appreciated visits to his troops on the western front, and in the following Special Order of the Day, dated August 15th, he gave expression to the pleasure it had been to him to come among his soldiers, and the pride he felt in their valour and cheerful endurance:—

"*Officers, Non-commissioned Officers and Men:*

"*It has been a great pleasure and satisfaction to me to be with my Armies during the past week. I have been able to judge for myself of their splendid condition for war and of the spirit of cheerful confidence which animates all ranks, united in loyal co-operation to their chiefs and to one another.*

"*Since my last visit to the front there has been almost uninterrupted fighting on parts of our line. The offensive recently begun has been resolutely maintained by day and by night. I have had opportunities of visiting some of the scenes of the later desperate struggles, and of appreciating to a slight extent the demands made upon your courage and physical endurance in order to assail and capture positions prepared during the past two years and stoutly defended to the last.*

"*I have realized, not only the splendid work which has been done in immediate touch with the enemy—in the air, underground, as well as on the ground—but also the vast organizations behind the fighting line, honourable alike to the genius of the initiators and to the heart and hand of the workers. Everywhere*

Digitized by Google

there is proof that all, men and women, are playing their part, and I rejoice to think their noble efforts are being heartily seconded by all classes at home.

" The happy relations maintained by my Armies and those of our French allies are equally noticeable between my troops and the inhabitants of the districts in which they are quartered, and from whom they have received a cordial welcome ever since their first arrival in France.

" Do not think that I and your fellow-countrymen forget the heavy sacrifices which the Armies have made and the bravery and endurance they have displayed during the past two years of bitter conflict. These sacrifices have not been in vain; the arms of the Allies will never be laid down until our cause has triumphed.

" I return home more than ever proud of you.

" May God guide you to victory.

(Sd.) *" GEORGE, R.I."*

Digitized by Google

Map 4

CHAPTER III.

1916.

THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME.

Battle Honours:

"Somme, 1916"—"Flers-Courcelette"—"Morval"—"Transloy."

ALREADY very early in the year 1916—actually on February 14th—the Allied commanders had accepted in principle the idea of seriously taking the offensive on the western front at some time during the coming summer. The choice of front for such an offensive as was envisaged was governed by the consideration that neither the British nor the French were numerically sufficiently strong to undertake independently the offensive on a really large scale, and consequently a combined attack had to be delivered. All possible preparations had early been put in hand, but for some time no decision was come to as to the actual date on which the attack should commence. For many reasons the British Commander-in-Chief was anxious to postpone his operations as long as possible; it is true that his supply of guns and ammunition was steadily and appreciably increasing, while his armies were growing in numbers—the six divisions of the original Expeditionary Force had now become something like seventy, while between January and July, 1916, the number of sabres and bayonets had increased from 450,000 to 660,000*—but a considerable portion of the officers and men composing the new units were still far from being fully trained, and the longer the attack could reasonably be deferred the more efficient would they become. On the other hand the Germans were pressing the French more strenuously at Verdun, while the Austrians had gained substantial successes against the Italian forces in the Trentino; and though, early in June, the efforts of our Russian allies had drawn off a number of German formations from the western to the eastern front, the strain about Verdun was not thereby appreciably diminished, and Generals Haig and Joffre came to the conclusion that the combined offensive by their armies must not be postponed later than the end of June.

The preparations were on a very large scale; huge stocks of ammunition and other stores had to be accumulated in convenient places, roads had to be improved, railways and tramways made, shelters and magazines had to be provided, mining operations undertaken, while more than 120 miles of water mains had to be laid so as to ensure an adequate water supply for the troops as they moved forward.

"The enemy's position to be attacked was of a very formidable character, situated on a high, undulating tract of ground, which rises to more than 500 feet above sea-level, and forms the watershed between the Somme on the one side

* Sir Douglas Haig's despatch of December 23rd, 1916.

Digitized by Google

and the rivers of south-west Belgium on the other. On the southern face of this watershed, the general trend of which is from east-south-east to west-north-west, the ground falls in a series of long irregular spurs and deep depressions to the valley of the Somme. Well down the forward slopes of this face the enemy's first system of defence, starting from the Somme near Curlu, ran at first north for 3,000 yards, then west for 7,000 yards to near Fricourt, where it turned nearly due north, forming a great salient in the enemy's line. Some 10,000 yards north of Fricourt the trenches crossed the River Ancre, a tributary of the Somme, and, still running north, passed over the summit of the watershed about Hébuterne and Gommecourt, and then down its northern spurs to Arras. On the 20,000 yards front between the Somme and the Ancre the enemy had a strong second system of defence, sited generally on or near the southern crest of the highest part of the watershed, at an average distance of from 3,000 to 5,000 yards behind his first system of defence."*

The operations included in the Battle of the Somme of this year are divided into three phases, the first beginning on July 1st and lasting until the 17th; the second then opening and continuing until the end of the first week in September; while the third and last, in which portion of the battle, or series of battles, only was the 2nd Battalion of our Regiment engaged, began on September 9th and endured until November 18th.

The Battalion remained practically throughout August on the Ancre in front of Beaumont Hamel, taking no part in any major operations, but just "holding on": the usual raids on the German trenches were from time to time carried out—there was one of these on the night of August 21st—22nd when two parties went out, one under Lieutenant Kaine, the other led by Sergeant Powditch, but both encountered strong enemy patrols just outside the wire; the Germans put up a trench mortar barrier in No Man's Land and the Foresters had one man wounded, while the heavy machine-gun fire prevented the return of the officer's patrol until 2 o'clock next morning. On this night Sergeant W. Weston, of the Regiment, greatly distinguished himself when the entrance to a mine near Mary Redan was blown in and several men were buried. Sergeant Weston evinced conspicuous gallantry and initiative in digging the men out under heavy fire. By his efforts and fine example, encouraging others to work, two of the five men buried were recovered alive.

During this period in the Beaumont Hamel sector a shell burst one morning in the headquarters officers' mess kitchen, killing the servants of the commanding officer, second-in-command, and adjutant, while practically the whole kitchen and its contents were wrecked; but of two others who were present at the time, Sergeant Barratt was not touched, while the medical officer's servant was blown out of the kitchen door, but was also unhurt. Some eggs and glass tumblers escaped all injury!

On the 29th the Brigade marched to Beauval, and thence by way of Flesselle, Allonville and Mericourt to Meaulte, which was reached on September 7th, and from here on the 11th the Foresters marched across country in a north-easterly direction, arriving at a point north of Carnoy about 1 p.m. Here dinners were served out—several heavy shells falling harmlessly close by during

* Despatch of December 23rd, 1916.

Digitized by Google

the meal—and then, leaving packs at the transport line with Major Street, Lieutenants Taylor and Mellor, the Battalion marched off after dark and took over trenches south-west of Guillemont; three companies were in a position about Arrowhead Copse and the fourth south of Guillemont. All had reached their allotted stations by 11.10 p.m.

The 6th Division was now in the XIVth Corps (Lieutenant-General the Earl of Cavan) of the Fourth Army, commanded by General Sir H. S. Rawlinson, and the order of battle of the Fourth Army, from south to north, was now as follows:—

XIVth Corps: 56th Division, 6th Division and Guards Division.

XVth Corps: 14th Division, 41st Division and New Zealand Division.

IIIrd Corps: 47th Division, 50th Division and 15th Division.

In a succession of hard-fought battles the Fourth Army had pushed the Germans back a considerable distance, but units were feeling the strain badly, and fresh troops were needed. "On the 9th September a successful attack had given us Ginchy and Leuze Wood, but the Germans were holding very strongly the high ground which lies in the form of a horse-shoe between the above-named points, and which dominates the country for some distance to the south. The trenches followed the shape of the spur roughly at the back end of the horse-shoe, and covered access was given to them by a sunken road leading back to the deep valley which runs north from Combles. At the top of the spur, just south of the railway and communicating with the sunken road, was a four-sided trench in the form of a parallelogram of some 300 yards by 150 yards, called by us the Quadrilateral. It was this strong point and the adjoining trenches which had held up the advance of the Fourth Army on the 9th September, and it was the first task of the 6th Division to obliterate the horse-shoe and straighten the line preparatory to a general attack on the 15th September."*

The XIVth Corps was the right of the British attack, and had its right on the north bank of the Somme.

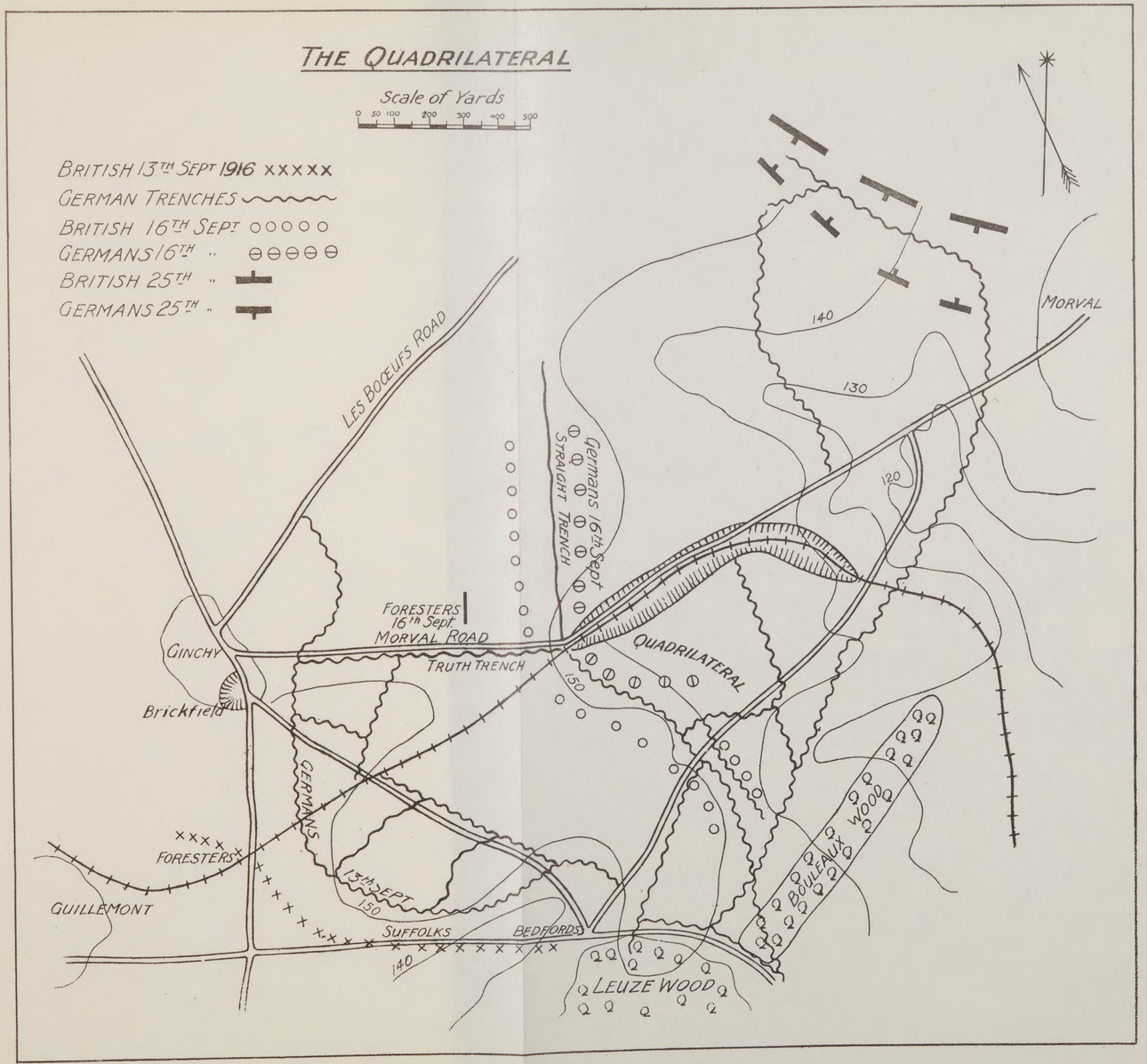
On the night of September 11th—12th the 71st Infantry Brigade relieved part of the Guards Division, while the 16th Brigade relieved part of the 56th Division, with orders to straighten the line by capturing the Quadrilateral. The operation orders issued to the 2nd Sherwood Foresters by the Brigadier directed that the Battalion was to attack at 6 a.m. on the 13th with two companies in the first line on a one-platoon front, one company in support and one in reserve, and, in accordance with the usual custom on such occasions, the commanding officer, company commanders and adjutant went up to the front line, then held by the 9th Suffolks, to view the position to be attacked.

The Guards and the 6th Division were to move north-east from Ginchy against Les Bœufs and Morval, but it was necessary as an initial operation to capture the strong work known as the Quadrilateral, situated about 700 yards east of Ginchy at a bend of the Morval road, where it passed through a deep ravine; and it was the special business of the 6th Division to capture this, with the 16th Brigade on the right, the 71st on the left, and the 18th Infantry Brigade in reserve, the left brigade advancing astride the railway with orders to drive

* *Short History of the 6th Division*, pp. 20, 21.

Digitized by Google

THE QUADRILATERAL



The Sherwood Foresters

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
ASTOR, LENOX
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS

Digitized by Google

the enemy out of T.20 Central and connect up between Ginchy Telegraph and the 16th Brigade.

At 3 a.m. on the 13th "B" and "C" Companies, under Captains March and Holden respectively, moved off to a position just south of the rubble-heap that had been the village of Ginchy, to take up positions in readiness to attack at 6 a.m.; "A" and "D" Companies were in support in reserve trenches west of Guillemont, while Battalion headquarters were established in the quarry west of the same village. About 4 a.m., no reports having come in from the leading companies, a patrol under Captain Gibbons was sent forward to try to clear up the situation, and later one of the men composing it returned and reported that "C" Company was held up by enemy machine-gun fire from its right, while on Captain Gibbons's return he stated that the right company was digging in on its objective, under enemy machine-gun fire from both right and left front. Still later again—about 8.35—Captain March got back a message from his company to the effect that after an advance of some 500 yards his men were digging in, under machine-gun fire, the direction of which he was unable to locate. These reports seemed to show that the first objective had been gained, and that so far the losses had not been heavy, but the runners had difficulty in getting through the fire, which had effectually destroyed all telephone lines.

As the afternoon wore on—at 4.15 p.m.—orders were received from the Brigade for the Battalion to renew the attack at 6 o'clock, in conjunction with the 9th Suffolks on the right and a company of Guards on the left, and the necessary instructions were at once sent up to the advanced companies by runners, but it was judged impossible in the time available to get "A" and "D" Companies into position to attack and "B" and "C" into support and reserve, so "B" and "C" were directed to attack, with "A" and "D" in support and reserve, while the Brigadier was asked to delay the commencement of the attack for thirty minutes; he decided, however, that this could not be done.

Battalion headquarters now, at 5.15 p.m., moved up near the point of assembly for attack, to an enemy dug-out under the railway south-east of Ginchy, but here nothing could be heard or seen of "B" and "C" Companies who, as it afterwards appeared, never received the orders; but "D" being ready in the support position, it was now directed to attack, and it accordingly advanced some 700 yards, meeting heavy casualties from enemy shells and machine guns, and finding the German wire intact and swept by machine guns. Very few of "D" Company got back. "B" and "C" were later found to be still holding on to the position gained by them in the morning. After dark "A" Company was ordered up and dug in on a position as far advanced as possible, the remaining men of "D" Company being attached to "A," while "B" and "C" carried on the line to the left.

September 14th passed tolerably quietly, but at night orders were received for the Battalion to be ready to support the 1st Battalion Leicestershire Regiment in an attack it was to make next morning at 6.30.

Lieutenant Taylor came up from the transport during the evening and took over command of "A" Company, the commander of which had been wounded.

At 6.30 a.m. on the 15th the Leicesters advanced through the Foresters to

Digitized by Google

attack their first objective, while the Battalion made ready to occupy and consolidate the positions captured and vacated by the Leicesters one and a half hours after the commencement of their advance; the companies were thus distributed: "A" and remainder of "D" in the front line on a two-platoon front: "B" and "C," each two platoons strong, on a one-platoon front in support. The advance began with an interval of 150 yards between companies, and came at once under heavy machine-gun fire from the right front, and it was almost at once found that the attacking battalion was held up and unable to get on, so the Foresters dug in some 150 yards in rear of it.

As the morning went on both battalions began to incur many casualties, and at 9.30 a patrol sent out from "B" Company to reconnoitre the German trench running north from the Quadrilateral in front of the Leicesters, where men in British helmets could be seen, reported the trench strongly held and heavily wired; of this patrol the non-commissioned officer in charge was killed and two men were wounded.

Towards the afternoon an enemy counter-attack seemed about to develop from the direction of Les Bœufs, but it was broken up by rifle-fire from the Foresters and the Guards on their left. Casualties were mounting up, especially among officers; Lieutenant-Colonel Hobbs was hit but remained on duty, and a message was sent back for Major Street and Lieutenant Mellor to come up.

The night of the 15th—16th was fairly quiet, though very cold, and at daybreak on the 16th the position occupied by the Battalion was very heavily shelled, and again at intervals during the day, but information received was that at dusk the 1st Battalion West Yorkshires, from the 18th Brigade, would relieve the Foresters. As a matter of fact, however, no relief came, but at 3.30 a.m. on the 17th the Battalion was ordered to vacate at once the positions held and proceed to Maltzhorn Farm trenches, which were reached about 5.30 that morning. A wet and uncomfortable day was spent here, and then, on the morning of the 19th, in accordance with orders received, the Brigade marched via Mametz to Ville-sur-Ancre, where the Battalion was accommodated in tolerably comfortable billets in the village, and where a much-needed reinforcement of 180 non-commissioned officers and men joined from the base, under Second-Lieutenant Cleveland.

The battle of September 15th was the first occasion on which tanks were employed by the British. These had come out from home some time before, and had been parked in secluded spots at the back of the front, and until the very eve of the advance few, even in the British Army, had heard of them; the Germans, however, appear to have heard rumours of them, and their troops were warned that the British had some strange new weapon. So far as the 6th Division was concerned the tanks were a failure, for of the three allotted two broke down before starting, while the third, moving off, in accordance with orders, long before the infantry, had its periscope shot off, its peep-holes blinded, was riddled by armour-piercing bullets, and had to come back without achieving anything.

It was now possible to determine the casualties in the Battalion during the fighting between September 12th to 19th inclusive, and these were terribly

Digitized by Google

Photo Imperial War Museum.

GINCHY.
SEPTEMBER, 1916.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

heavy. The strength of the 2nd Sherwood Foresters going into action on the 12th was 681 all ranks, and of these 17 officers and 421 other ranks were killed, wounded and missing. The officers killed were: Lieutenants R. W. Fellowes and S. W. Moult, Second-Lieutenants M. R. Allen, R. F. Callaway and F. A. Hyrons; while those wounded were Lieutenant-Colonel C. J. W. Hobbs, Captains W. S. Holden, F. J. Gibbons and G. T. March, Lieutenants A. J. Kaine, W. A. Ebsworth and F. J. Mellor, Second-Lieutenants E. Brown, J. C. Runtz, T. A. R. Barnes, K. Grounds and W. E. Brandt.

Some five days were spent at Ville-sur-Ancre, but the large number of other ranks—320—who here joined the Battalion caused much time to be devoted to reorganization which might profitably have been given up to real rest and thorough refitting. Opportunity was taken of sending in the names of some twenty-one officers, non-commissioned officers and men who had specially distinguished themselves during the recent fighting: two of these (both, unhappily, shown as "since dead") were recommended by Lieutenant-Colonel Hobbs (himself no mean judge of gallantry in action) for the Victoria Cross—Second-Lieutenant R. F. Callaway and No. 11319 Private T. Stretton.

On the 24th the Brigade moved back again towards the front, and next morning the Battalion was placed at the disposal of the Officer Commanding 18th Brigade (Brigadier-General R. J. Bridgford), when "A," "B" and "C" Companies took up a position in trenches north-west of the Ginchy—Les Bœufs road, while "D" and Battalion headquarters occupied trenches south-west of Ginchy; and here, or hereabouts, the 2nd Foresters remained during the remainder of September, having two more officers wounded in the last half of the month—Lieutenants W. H. Davis and W. Charlesworth—so that the total casualties in all ranks during the month, killed, wounded, missing and sick, totalled 654; against this 12 officers and 529 other ranks joined the Battalion during September in drafts from home or from the base. The following were the officers: Captain L. W. Hancock, Lieutenant D. G. Brook, Second-Lieutenants L. G. A. Springham, A. Slater, C. Cousins, L. Smith, F. E. Gauntlett, T. Rose, W. Charlesworth, W. A. Edwards, H. Ellis and A. S. Cleveland. Then, early in October, a small draft of 16 other ranks joined, and a quite disproportionately large number of young officers, viz., Lieutenant J. V. Shelley, Second-Lieutenants M. M. Shaw, C. B. Loveday, J. Brittan, K. J. Bunting, H. L. Kerrick, G. G. Furness, S. M. Williams, F. Davis and H. G. Wildbore, but of these poor young Williams was killed on October 16th and Loveday within ten days of his arrival at the front.

On October 14th the Battalion was occupying the section north of Les Bœufs when operation orders from the Brigade directed the Foresters to attack certain gun pits and new German trenches, in conjunction with the 18th Infantry Brigade, at 5.30 a.m. next day. "D" Company, under Major Street, was detailed to carry out the assault on the gun pits with two platoons in the first wave, and the company bombers and three Lewis guns in the second wave. At 5.35 a.m. on the 15th the British guns opened an intense bombardment and the attack was launched, but while that part of the enemy line—the gun pits—assailed by the Battalion was captured and held, the left attack made little ground, and a final attempt made to push forward the line in this section of the

Digitized by Google

attack with fresh troops was only partially successful. At 7 a.m. a message was received from Company Sergeant-Major Rowe, "D" Company, stating that the gun pits had been captured, but that Major Street had been badly wounded during the early morning; half an hour later Second-Lieutenant Byles reported by runner that the objective had been taken without serious loss, but that several casualties had been since incurred from snipers and enemy machine guns 150 or 200 yards to the front. Captain Backhouse was now sent up to take command of "D" Company and to report on the situation, but was killed while going up, and as no report was received by 11 a.m. Colonel Hobbs himself went to the front line to judge of events, and on his return asked the Brigadier for a reinforcement of two platoons and two Lewis guns to be sent up after dark by the supporting battalion.

Early in the afternoon orders were issued for all the gun pits to be connected up and a communication trench dug rearwards so as to join up with Cloudy Trench, while at the same time a fire-trench was to be dug round the gun pits to connect with the right of Cloudy Trench. In the evening, about 6 o'clock, Colonel Hobbs again went up to the line, and received very severe wounds, from which he shortly after died, to the inexpressible grief of all those whom for so many anxious months he had commanded with such conspicuous success, and equally of all those older comrades of his with whom Charles Hobbs had served in other fields. He left behind him a very cherished memory, and to the Battalion and Regiment a bright and enduring example.

The command of the Battalion now devolved on the adjutant, Captain Jones, M.C.

The orders for work which Colonel Hobbs had previously given were scrupulously carried out under shell fire, and during the night the gun pits were connected up and the fire and communication trenches were dug. The Battalion maintained its position during the 16th and 17th, being visited on the latter day by Major Sherbrooke and the four company commanders of the 1st Battalion of the Regiment, which expected to take over this portion of the line very shortly. On the 19th the Battalion was relieved by the 2nd Northamptonshire Regiment, and moved back to bivouacs in Bernafay Wood, arriving there early on the morning of the 20th. Command of the 2nd Foresters was now assumed by Major F. E. Bradshaw, late Indian Army, and on this day the 6th Division was relieved and transferred to the First Army (General Horne), going into Corps Reserve of the Ist Corps, the divisional headquarters being at Béthune, and the brigades in the town and surrounding area; the Battalion finally settled down about October 28th in fairly comfortable billets at Fouquereuil.

"The Division had taken part as a whole in three general attacks on the Somme (15th and 25th September and 12th October), and had also carried out subordinate operations on 13th and 18th September and 18th October. It had suffered casualties amounting to 277 officers and 6640 other ranks, and had well earned a rest."*

During October the 2nd Battalion Sherwood Foresters had again suffered severe losses, 7 officers and 40 other ranks being killed or having died of wounds,

* *Short History of the 6th Division*, p. 27.

Digitized by Google

1 officer and 144 non-commissioned officers and men were wounded, while 6 men were missing. The officers who died were Lieutenant-Colonel C. J. W. Hobbs, D.S.O., Major E. R. Street, D.S.O., Captain H. E. Backhouse, Lieutenant G. S. Taylor, Second-Lieutenants S. M. Williams, C. B. Loveday and A. S. Cleveland; the officer wounded was Second-Lieutenant K. J. Bunting.

During the whole of the Somme fighting not once did the Battalion transport fail to bring out all that was needed at the front, either under Captain Backhouse, transport officer, or under Major Tomlinson, the quartermaster: the latter officer was noticed sitting at the ration dump for a good four hours on the night of October 17th, looking after the rations, and especially the water supply in petrol tins—with a heavy German barrage falling ceaselessly in front of and behind him!

The Battalion spent in all some six weeks on the Somme, and the casualties sustained amounted to 12 officers and 152 non-commissioned officers and men killed, 16 officers and 625 other ranks wounded, or a total casualty list of 805. That these great sacrifices were not offered in vain, and that the fine efforts made and gallantry evinced were appreciated, may be seen from the following orders issued and messages received during the fighting on the Somme in September and October.

Thus the following message was sent on September 16th by Major-General C. Ross, the commander of the 6th Division, to the battalions composing the 71st Infantry Brigade:—

"The Major General wishes the G.O.C. 71st Infantry Brigade to convey to his Battalions and Machine Gun Company his great appreciation of the splendid fashion in which they carried out the task given to them. The general situation demanded an attack on a strongly entrenched, an unreconnoitred, and, as it proved, a well-wired enemy, without much preparation. This, the most difficult task which can be given to soldiers, was carried out with unflinching gallantry and devotion."

On the following day the Commander-in-Chief of the British Armies in France wrote as follows to General Sir H. Rawlinson, commanding the Fourth Army:—

"The great successes won by the Fourth Army on the 15th are most satisfactory, and have brought us another long step forward towards final victory. The further advance yesterday after such severe fighting was also a very fine performance, highly creditable to the troops and to Corps, Divisional and Brigade Staffs. Our new engine of war, the Heavy Section Machine Gun Corps, acquitted itself splendidly on its first trial, and has proved itself a very valuable addition to the Army. My warmest congratulations to you and the Fourth Army on a very fine achievement."

His Majesty the King also did not fail to send his congratulations to his soldiers on the success of the mid-September operations:—

"I congratulate you and my brave troops on the brilliant success just achieved. I have never doubted that complete victory will ultimately crown our efforts, and the splendid result of the fighting yesterday confirmed this view."

Digitized by Google

With the closing operations of the Somme battles, which did not actually come to an end until November 14th, the 2nd Battalion of our Regiment had no further concern, and during the greater part of that month it remained in the area about Béthune; but the Foresters had manfully played their part in helping to attain the results achieved. The Battle of the Somme "relieved Verdun and enabled Nivelle to advance presently to conspicuous success. In the second place, it detained the main German forces on the western front. In the third place, it drew into the battle and gravely depleted the surplus man-power of the enemy, and struck a shattering blow at his *moral*. . . . The Battle of the Somme had, therefore, fulfilled the Allied purpose in taxing to the uttermost the German war machine. It tried the command, it tried the nation at home, and it tried to the last limit of endurance the men in the line."*

Finally, the purely material results of the battle were very great, since during the weeks between July 1st and November 18th the British on the Somme took just over 38,000 prisoners, including 800 officers, 29 heavy guns, 96 field guns, 136 trench mortars and 514 machine guns.

Perhaps, however, the most satisfactory tribute to the success of the Allies in the Somme battles comes from one of our enemies, General Ludendorff, who thus described the situation in which Germany found herself in the middle of November, 1916, he wrote: "our position was uncommonly difficult, and a way out hard to find. We could not contemplate an offensive ourselves, having to keep our reserves available for defence. . . . If the war lasted our defeat seemed inevitable."

The Division was now in the La Bassée sector, which included the famous Givenchy Ridge and Cuinchy Brickstacks, and later on, in the month of November, it side-stepped to the Cambrin—Hohenzollern front of about 5,500 yards. All this front had a most evil reputation, but the enemy was so utterly exhausted by the Somme fighting that the period passed in these parts was an especially quiet one, and the casualties would have been even fewer than they were had it not been for the many raids which the British here carried out.

During the month of October there had been a change in the command of the 71st Infantry Brigade, Brigadier-General E. Feetham, C.B., taking the place of Brigadier-General Edwards, with effect from the 5th.

While at Fouquereuil the Battalion settled seriously down to various courses of training: musketry was carried out, bayonet fighting was practised, large parties of officers and men were sent away for varying periods and were attached to different Royal Engineer companies and were employed in tunnelling, in building deep dug-outs and underground communication trenches; other officers and men were told off for "specialist" training, and underwent instruction of all kinds under so-called experts. About this time a new box respirator for protection against enemy gas appears to have made its appearance, and companies were fitted with these, and invited—under some pressure—to pass through the gas chamber in this unbecoming disguise!

Such minor moves as were now occasionally made took the Battalion to support line trenches south of the La Bassée Canal and west of Cuinchy along

* Buchan, *A History of the Great War*, vol. III, pp. 215, 217.

Digitized by Google

Harley Street, or to the front line system and the occupation of trenches bearing the homelike names of Esperanto Terrace and Marylebone Road. During the whole of this month there was no more than one casualty—one man wounded—so that the reinforcements, meagre as they were, more than balanced the wastage, 3 officers—Lieutenant J. C. Roberts, Second-Lieutenants W. E. Hands and G. Cartledge—and 53 non-commissioned officers and men joining the service companies from the base or home. During December there was rather more activity displayed by the enemy, who made considerable use of his trench mortars, but there was a good deal of fog and mist which made observation and accurate shooting difficult by either side. It seems, however, to have been felt that symptoms of enemy activity should be repressed, and the Battalion was ordered to carry out a raid on the night of December 19th-20th.

Two patrols accordingly moved out to reconnoitre the enemy's wire and having special orders to enter the enemy's line by any possible gap and secure an identification. No 1 party, under Lieutenant J. V. Shelley, started forth about 2.40 a.m. on the 20th from the front of the left company, but failed to get through the enemy wire, and the party accordingly returned, after bombing a German sentry post in the Embankment redoubt and also a sniper's post on the embankment. No. 2 party, led by Sergeant J. Staples, left the front of the right company at 2.40 a.m. and worked round the lip of Stirling Crater, reaching the enemy wire due east of Argyll and Sutherland Highlander Sap North. Working along the wire to the right a small gap was discovered, and the party lay down here for about half an hour and listened. They then moved rather more to the right and found a bigger gap, where they again lay down and waited for three quarters of an hour.

Sergeant Staples, leaving the party in position, pushed on alone and worked along the parapet for a few yards, and, after another short wait, dropped into the enemy trench. Then a figure—whether that of the sergeant or of a German soldier the watchers could not determine—was seen to spring out on to the parapet and immediately drop back into the trench again; three revolver shots and a few rifle shots were heard, accompanied by German exclamations and the distinct sound of a struggle. Rifle and grenade fire now forced the patrol to retire, and a subsequent search failed to reveal any sign of Sergeant Staples, who was consequently reported missing.

The Battalion was so fortunate as to spend Christmas Day out of the line this year at La Bourse, in "only fairly comfortable" billets, and there were football matches, dinners by relays in the Y.M.C.A. Hut, and a concert in the evening.

This month the toll of losses was rather heavier than in November, but was still low for a war of this magnitude, numbering only 3 killed, 10 wounded and 1 missing, while there were only 14 sick.

Again at this, the third Christmas of the war, His Majesty the King sent gracious messages to his troops in the field: in the one he said, addressing more especially those who were still carrying on the stern fight:—

"I send you, my sailors and soldiers, hearty good wishes for Christmas and the New Year. My grateful thoughts are ever with you for victories gained, for

Digitized by Google

hardships endured, and for your unfailing cheerfulness. Another Christmas has come round and we are still at war, but the Empire, confident in you, remains determined to win.

"May God bless and protect you!"

The other message, addressed more particularly to those suffering from the effects of wounds and exposure, ran as follows:—

"At this Christmastide the Queen and I are thinking more than ever of the sick and wounded among My sailors and soldiers. From Our hearts we wish them strength to bear their sufferings, speedy restoration to health, a peaceful Christmas, and many happier years to come."

Digitized by Google

Map 4

CHAPTER IV.

JANUARY—JULY, 1917.

In the Field-Marshal's despatch of May 31st, 1917, he wrote:—"Our operations prior to the 18th November, 1916, had forced the enemy into a very pronounced salient in the area between the Ancre and the Scarpe valleys, and had obtained for us greatly improved opportunities for observation over this salient. A comparatively short further advance would give us complete possession of the few points south of the Ancre to which the enemy still clung, and would enable us to gain entire command of the spur above Beaumont Hamel."

In the middle of November, 1916, the Allied Commanders-in-Chief, Generals Joffre and Haig, had made their plans for 1917, under which the pressure upon the enemy was to be maintained throughout the winter, and the troops were to be prepared for an offensive early in 1917; the British armies, in fact, were to attack by February 1st between Bapaume and the Vimy Ridge, while our allies struck between the Oise and the Somme. But by December 16th, 1916, a change in the French command had come about, Nivelle taking the place of Joffre, and the plan was then remodelled, the arrangement now being that as a main operation the French were to endeavour to break through on the Aisne by the employment of an overpowering number of divisions. To obtain this great preponderance of force, it was necessary that as many French divisions as possible should be replaced by a corresponding number of British units, and Haig was asked to extend his line south of the Somme as far as a point opposite the town of Roye. This request was loyally complied with, and the required extension of our line was completed by February 26th, 1917. "This alteration entailed the maintenance by British forces of an exceptionally active front of 110 miles, including the whole of the Somme battlefront, and, combined with the continued activity maintained throughout the winter, interfered to no small extent with my arrangement for reliefs. The training of the troops had consequently to be restricted to such limited opportunities as circumstances from time to time permitted."*

During the closing weeks of the Somme struggle the Germans had already began to prepare defensive lines in their rear for their armies to retreat to and hold; our enemies called the various sectors of this line after the heroes of their national mythology—Woden, Siegfried, Brunhilde and the like; but by the Allies they were known as the Hindenburg Line, after the soldier who was credited with their creation, and who now had been summoned from the east of Europe to redress the balance in the west. The flanks of the Hindenburg Line rested on Vimy Ridge in the north and on the St. Gobain Forest and the Chemin des Dames in the south.

* Despatch of May 31st, 1917.

Digitized by Google

The general disposition of the British forces after the extension to the south above mentioned was as follows: General Plumer's Second Army was about the Ypres Salient; south of Plumer, in the Armentières district, was the First Army, under General Horne; and Allenby's Third Army carried the line onwards to the south of Arras. From the point upon which the British line had hinged during the Somme Operations, Gough's Fifth Army took over the front, and this joined on to Rawlinson's Fourth Army near the old French position.

With the opening of the new year came a period of bitter frost, with heavy snowstorms, but as soon as the worst of this winter weather seemed past and active operations again became possible, the enemy was driven in the first part of January from that portion of the Beaumont Hamel spur which he was still holding; and during the early days of February the success of some hard fighting brought the British forward north of the Ancre to a point level with the centre of Grandcourt, thus obliging the enemy to vacate the last remaining portion of the German second line system hereabouts. Further British offensives towards the middle of February led to the evacuation of Miraumont and Serre. Between February 25th and March 2nd a series of attacks was carried out against "a strong secondary line of defence, which from a point in the Le Transloy—Loupart line due west of the village of Beaulencourt, crossed in front of Ligny—Tilloy and Le Barque to the southern defences of Loupart Wood."

The Battalion spent the month of January, 1917, in tolerable quiet, but the weather was very cold and miserable; when in the front line the trenches occupied were in the sector known as Exeter Castle, while when at rest the Foresters were in billets at Mazingarbe. The casualties must for this month be regarded as light, all things considered, 6 men being killed and 16 wounded, while Lieutenants W. A. Platt and J. S. Whitelegg, Second-Lieutenants P. C. Barnes, B. G. Barnes, A. Wheatley and R. H. Penton and 102 other ranks joined for duty.

In February some not unwelcome excitement was provided in the form of a raid upon the enemy's front line. At 7 a.m. on the 9th "C" Company, about 100 strong, under Major J. P. Wylie, raided the enemy's front line through gaps cut in his wire by our guns, trench mortars, and by a "Bangalore" torpedo, which last had been successfully placed in position and exploded by a party under Second-Lieutenant M. M. Shaw, under cover of a smoke barrage. The O.C. Raid was, as stated, Major Wylie, while the assaulting party was commanded by Lieutenant C. Roberts and the other parties were led by Second-Lieutenants Shaw, Edwards, Hands and Furness. Part of the enemy's front line could not be recognized, having been obliterated by our shells, but the parties successfully penetrated the German front line for 200 yards, remained there some considerable time, killed and wounded some 60 of the enemy, and bombed and blew up the entrances to no fewer than twenty dug-outs. "The enemy," so the report states, "showed little disposition to fight." Eight prisoners were captured and brought back in triumph, four of them wounded, and three being wearers of the Iron Cross; they belonged to the 26th Infantry Regiment, and were for the most part Saxons.

One of the prisoners taken had evidently, when the Foresters burst in upon

Digitized by Google

him, been in the act of drawing on his trousers, and was found standing with his hands up over his head and his trousers down over his boots—a somewhat defenceless posture! From his prison camp in England he sent a grateful message to the officer—Shaw—who had shouted not to bayonet him, but to take him prisoner, thereby, as the man graphically expressed it, "saving me from being slaughtered!"

Our casualties were: Second-Lieutenant G. G. Furness and 9 non-commissioned officers and men killed, while Second-Lieutenants Edwards and Hands, who remained at duty, and 29 other ranks were wounded. All our killed and wounded were brought back to our lines.

The next day's diary reports that the enemy "seemed very nervous"—possibly excusable enough, "the morning after the day before," when a boisterous party of Foresters had burst in upon them, all carrying lethal weapons and determined upon their useful employment!

When on the 17th of the month the Battalion came out of the line on relief by the 62nd Brigade, it marched to and took over billets at Beuvry, remaining here for nearly ten days and being joined by Second-Lieutenants Gregory, Beanland and Paterson, and 101 other ranks; then, on the 27th, the Battalion moved to Verquin, billeted there for the night, and marched next day, via Noeux-les-Mines, back to Mazingarbe, whence the line was again taken over from Philosophe Cross Roads—"line very bad in places and mostly held by posts." Here the companies in the trenches were occasionally annoyed by a novel form of missile—aerial darts, and on March 4th two young officers—Second-Lieutenants Springham and Paterson—were slightly wounded by some of these, but remained at duty. On the 14th Captain Griffiths and Second-Lieutenant Jackson joined for duty, and next day the Battalion, on being relieved, took over the support line trenches, two companies south of Hulluch Road, one company north of Hulluch Road, and the remaining company in the reserve trench, being all in close support of the 1st Battalion Leicestershire Regiment in the front line, and being placed under the orders of the officer commanding that battalion.

On the 17th Major Addison-Smith, Seaforth Highlanders, was posted to the 2nd Sherwood Foresters for duty, and took over second-in-command.

The Germans now showed an increased activity, their machine gunners "getting busy," and on March 25th, about 4.30 a.m., the enemy made a raid on the left of the Battalion front. The Foresters at this time were holding a very extended line, with a gap of 150 yards between the left sentry group and the 9th Battalion Norfolk Regiment. The Germans began by putting up a very heavy barrage with minnenwerfers and aerial darts over the whole Battalion front, and managed to enter the trenches through a gap on the left, working up behind this flank and rushing an isolated sentry group guarding two Stokes mortars: they were, however, beaten off, leaving 1 officer and 1 man dead in the Battalion trenches, but captured 8 men of the Norfolks and 1 Forester.

Since March 1st the 6th Division had taken "over a front of 11,000 yards, extending north from the Double Crassier at Loos, with sectors Loos—14 Bis—Hulluch—Hohenzollern, all three brigades being in line and a brigade of the

Digitized by Google

21st Division also, which came under the command of the G.O.C. 6th Division."*

April was a month of many excitements, and both sides raided or tried to raid each other in turn, and on the 5th the Germans attempted to raid Border Redoubt at the Southern Crater and the front line just north of the Hairpin Craters, with results which are best described in the report sent in by the officer commanding the company of the battalion concerned, who wrote as follows:— "On April 5th, about 5.30 a.m., a party of Germans, variously estimated at from 30 to 50, attempted to rush the Southern Crater from a sap near their own craters. A Lewis gun from the Rat Creek Post opened on them, and also a Lewis gun from the left of the Hairpin Craters. They were at once detected by Second-Lieutenant Gardiner and Privates Ives and Beardsley. The first two threw bombs and Private Beardsley opened fire with a Lewis gun which jammed, and he then fired grenades from the shoulder at the enemy. Everybody at once threw bombs, which put up such an offensive barrage of bombs that the raiders were repulsed and ran back to their trench. Our artillery was very quick in opening fire, and none of their shells went short. As the raiders turned, the Germans sent up many white lights to guide them back, and put up a barrage of trench mortar bombs on our front line to facilitate withdrawal. They also carried a white tape to guide them on the return journey. They helped each other back and left no dead or wounded. Their leader, a very tall man, threw bombs into our trench which wounded two of our men. We had no other casualties in this company." Captain Roberts specially recommended Privates Ives and Beardsley for promptitude and coolness under fire.

On the 15th the Foresters tried to get "some of their own back," and what happened is given in the report submitted to the Brigade by Lieutenant-Colonel Bradshaw; he wrote: "About 3 p.m. on the 16th, Lieutenant Cowgill and Second-Lieutenant Jackson were on patrol with a party of 10 men; they entered the German lines south of the Hairpin Craters, and having waited in vain till nearly dawn for any party of Germans that might arrive, they attempted to return by the gap through which they had come. This they were unable to find owing to the pitch darkness, although on two previous occasions Lieutenant Cowgill had been through the same gap. While between two thick belts of German wire they were discovered and challenged by the enemy. Lieutenant Cowgill, with the object of covering the withdrawal of his men by cowing the enemy, ordered them to throw their bombs and then to dash back through the wire. The Germans replied very vigorously with about fifty bombs and some rifle fire. Our party were enabled to get through the wire by the light of half a dozen Very lights thrown up by the Germans. The officers had got clear when they found that Lance-Corporal Squires, who was with them, had fallen badly wounded in the wire. Lieutenant Cowgill and Second-Lieutenant Jackson at once turned back and brought him in, in spite of heavy bomb, rifle and machine-gun fire. They had some difficulty in doing this, as he was very weak from loss of blood. Both these officers received slight wounds and are still at duty.

"Second-Lieutenant Shaw and 9 men went out about the same time to cut out a German sentry post on the north of the Hairpin Crater. They were

* *Short History of the 6th Division*, p. 28.

Digitized by Google

discovered, owing to an unfortunate cough, and fired on by a machine gun, while bombs were thrown at them by another sentry group. Second-Lieutenant Shaw then ordered his men to leave their bombs with him and withdraw, while he engaged the machine gun with bombs from a shell-hole to cover their withdrawal. He himself did not withdraw until his men were safe and he had finished his supply of bombs."

About the beginning of the last week in April several contradictory orders were issued as to prospective events and possible happenings, but finally, on the 23rd, the Battalion moved at short notice to Maroc, soon after arrival at which place the enemy started shelling the batteries on the western outskirts, when a shell landed in the road and severely wounded Second-Lieutenant Springham. At Maroc the Foresters came under the orders of the General Officer commanding 16th Infantry Brigade (Brigadier-General W. L. Osborn), and on the night of the 24th moved up to the trenches as left support battalion, the enemy shelling Loos and the road by which the Battalion was marching. "Second-Lieutenant Jackson," we read in the diary of this date, "was wounded in the throat and head, and a lance-corporal got shell shock. It was impossible to tell how serious Jackson's wound was, as he was bandaged up on the road by the subdued light of matches!"

Here the Battalion headquarters was under the Loos Crassier, an abode of unusual luxury and lit by electric light; but on the 26th these cheerful surroundings had to be surrendered and the Regiment reverted to the 71st Brigade, where a battalion reorganization was carried into effect under orders recently issued. These directed that each company was now to be composed for fighting purposes of three platoons, each of a minimum strength of 28, plus platoon and company headquarters, the remains of the 4th platoon being left in rear in the event of the Battalion going into action.

The Battalion, when in the front line at the end of April, appears to have occupied trenches of an unusual type; they are described as "very wide at the top—about 15 feet—narrowing down to a footpath at the bottom. In many places they are filled with débris, bayonets or rifles being visible. Doubtless the owners are underneath!"

The casualties were rather heavy again this month, "A" Company suffering especially, as in the part of the line occupied by them there was no dug-out accommodation and they were almost continuously shelled. They lost an officer—Second-Lieutenant G. E. Beanland—and Company Sergeant-Major Else, and the total losses in the Battalion during April were 1 officer and 17 men killed, 9 officers and 87 other ranks wounded.

"During ten days the Division had been engaged in continuous fighting on the front of one brigade, whilst holding with the other two a front of approximately 7,000 yards. Four battalions from other brigades, in addition to its own four, had passed through the hands of the 16th Infantry Brigade, which was conducting the fighting. Battalions relieved from the fighting front one night were put straight into the line elsewhere on the following night, and the battalions which had already done a long and continuous tour in the trenches were relieved one night, put into the fighting front on the following night, and twenty-four hours later had to deliver an attack. The enemy, concerned about the fate of Hill 70, concentrated a very formidable artillery on the narrow front

Digitized by Google

involved, and the bombardments and barrages on the front of attack were of exceptional severity. The extent to which the Division was stretched on the rest of its front is exemplified by two incidents. On one occasion an enemy raid penetrated our front and support lines without being detected or meeting anyone, and came upon our reserve line by chance at the only place on the front of the brigade concerned where there was one company in that line. At another part of the front it was found, when normal conditions were restored, that in an abandoned part of our front line between two posts, the enemy had actually made himself so much at home that he had established a small dump of rations and bombs!

"For the manner in which the Division had followed up and pressed the enemy withdrawal it received the thanks of the Commander-in-Chief."*

The first fortnight of May passed much as usual, but on relief on the night of the 18th the Battalion found "buses" waiting, by which all ranks travelled in some comfort to Verquin, where nearly ten days were spent in training, in attending medal parades, and in "cleaning up." While here "A," "C" and "D" Companies were at Vaudricourt and "B" at Drouvin; here, or just before moving thither, the following officers joined for duty: Temporary Captains F. E. Wright and J. D. Groves, both of the Derbyshire Yeomanry, Lieutenant N. H. Beedham, Second-Lieutenants Bright and Connor. In an unsuccessful raid carried out by the Battalion on the 14th, Second-Lieutenant B. G. Barnes and some 30 other ranks were wounded.

By the night of the 26th the 2nd Battalion was up in the line again, in the St. Elie left subsection, and at 5 a.m. on the 28th proceeded to carry out a raid, conducted by 6 officers and 133 non-commissioned officers and men, on the enemy front and support line trenches. The officer in command of the raiding party was Major Addison-Smith, Lieutenant Platt was officer commanding assault, while the different parties were led by Second-Lieutenants Wildbore, Paterson, Trohear and Whitelegg. All the objectives were reached, the raiders remained the prescribed time—twenty-seven minutes—in the German trenches, and blew in several dug-outs with mobile charges. Eleven German bodies were left in the trench, two unwounded German prisoners were brought back, while one German who was wounded, and ran into a dug-out, had a mobile charge thrown into the dug-out after him—a form of playfulness which no doubt he thoroughly appreciated! The barrage put down by our artillery was excellent, but several casualties were caused by enemy retaliation with minnenwerfers—9 men being killed, while 2 died of their wounds, and 2 officers and 24 other ranks were wounded, the officers being Second-Lieutenants Cousins and Edwards. Of these the former, who had been over the ground before, led the raiders, while Second-Lieutenant Edwards, who had been detailed to put up a bomb barrage, was wounded just as the raid commenced, but carried on with his job.

During the past five months, while the 2nd Battalion Sherwood Foresters had been engaged in more or less continuous fighting, enduring a steady wastage of war-trained officers and other ranks who could not easily be replaced, the Battalion had played no part in the many important battles which had been

* *Short History of the 6th Division*, pp. 30, 31.

Digitized by Google

taking place upon the Western front, and of which some mention must now be given in order to preserve a correct view of the general sequence of events.

The German retreat to the Hindenburg Line, of which something has already been said, commenced on March 14th and came to an end on April 5th, and was followed by an event of far-reaching significance, when on April 6th the United States House of Representatives, by a majority of 373 votes to 50, passed a resolution declaring the existence of a state of war with Germany, and authorizing the President " to employ the entire naval and military forces of the United States and the resources of the Government to carry on war against the Imperial German Government; and to bring the conflict to a successful termination all the resources of the country are hereby pledged by the Congress of the United States."

On April 9th the Battle of Arras opened with the Battles of Vimy Ridge and of the Scarpe, continued with the second Battle of the Aisne, and endured until May 4th; while the Battle of Bullecourt, which began on the 3rd of that month, closed only on the 17th.

The results of the spring fighting of this year are summed up by Sir Douglas Haig in his despatch of December 31st, 1917, in which he says: " on the British front alone, in less than one month's fighting, we had captured over 19,500 prisoners, including over 400 officers, and had also taken 257 guns, including 98 heavy guns, with 464 machine guns, 227 trench mortars, and immense quantities of other war material. Our line had been advanced to a greatest depth exceeding five miles on a total front of over twenty miles, representing a gain of some sixty square miles of territory. A great improvement had been effected in the general situation of our troops on the front attacked, and the capture of Vimy Ridge had removed a constant menace to the security of our line."

On the night of April 18th—19th the 71st Brigade was relieved by the 147th Brigade of the 49th Division, and the Battalions then proceeded by " bus " to Verquin, where they remained undergoing training of various kinds until the 27th, on the evening of which day the Sherwood Foresters marched to Calonne, west of Lens, arriving at 10.30 p.m. and coming now under the orders of the 46th Division (Major-General W. Thwaites), then engaged in active operations in this neighbourhood; the 9th Battalion Norfolk Regiment was also attached for duty, and the Foresters were placed in Divisional Reserve. The Battalion was early visited by two officers of the Divisional Staff, and one of these proved to be Major Webb, of the 1st Battalion of the Regiment.

The commanding officer and company commanders went forward on two occasions to make themselves acquainted as far as possible with the general situation, and on the afternoon of the 29th it was decided at a divisional conference, in view of the success of certain operations which had been carried out on the 28th, to attempt to improve the situation with the 139th Brigade, and the Battalion was placed at the disposal of the General Officer Commanding that unit (Brigadier-General G. G. S. Carey), the object of the 46th Division being to attempt the capture of the last line of German defences to the west of Lens. The 139th Brigade was wholly composed of battalions of the Sherwood Foresters —the 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th.

The following is taken from Colonel Bradshaw's report on the operations

Digitized by Google

that now took place, and in which the Battalion under his command was engaged:—

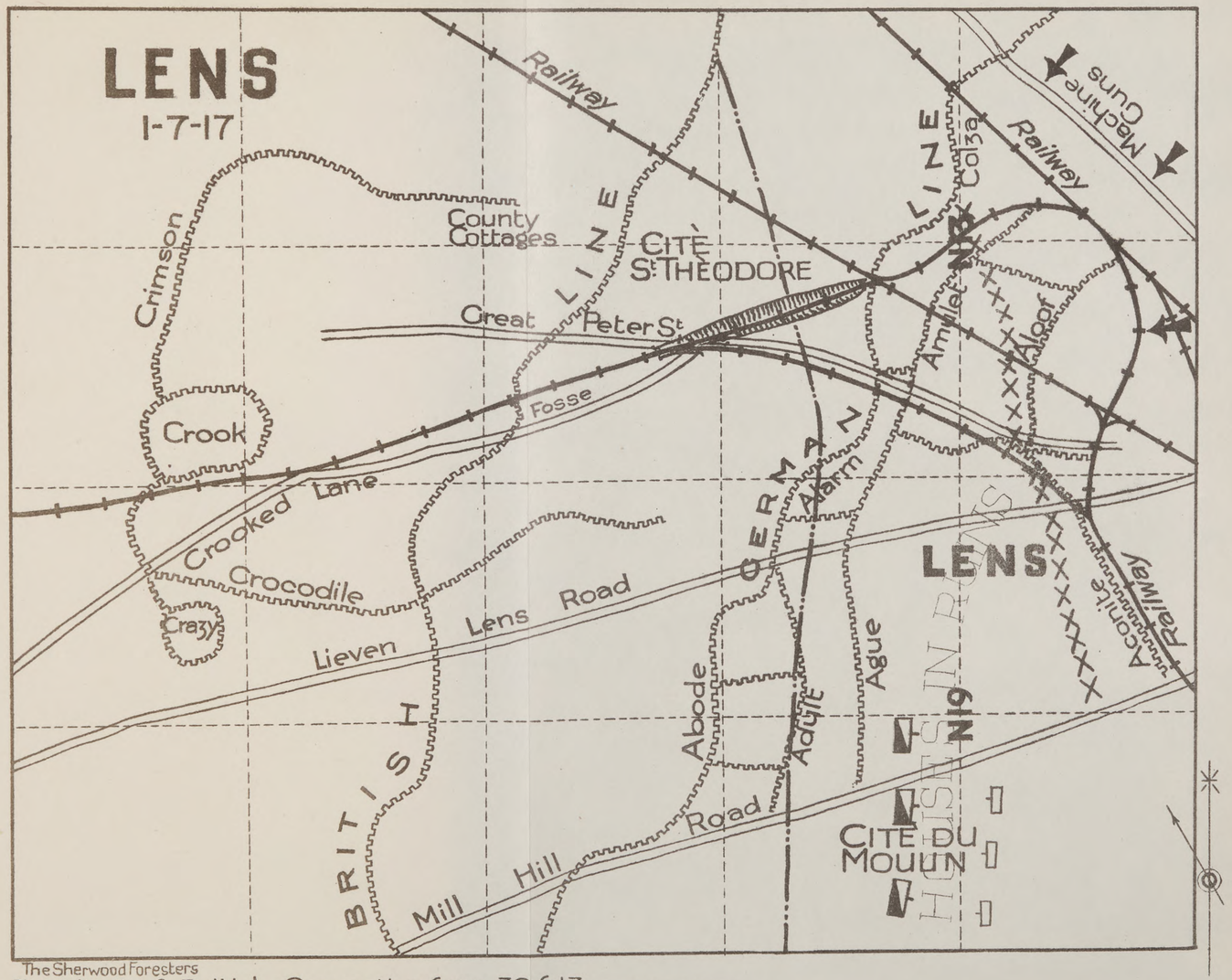
"On the 29th (June) I was ordered to attend a C.O.'s conference at 2 p.m. at the left (139th) Infantry Brigade headquarters, and another at 9.30 the same night; information of probable impending operations was then given, and I was told that the 2nd Sherwood Foresters were attached for them to the 139th Brigade.

"The 46th Division Operation Order No. 210 dated 29.6.17 reached me at 1.30 a.m on 30th, and warning orders were issued to my company commanders giving all reliable (?available) information. At 3 p.m. Operation Order No. 126 of the 139th Infantry Brigade reached Battalion headquarters." (This order decided that the Forester Brigade, *plus* the 2nd Battalion of the Regiment, was to advance upon the Lens—Liévin road and the network of trenches in front of it—an ideal ground for defence, with houses, slagheaps and railway embankments.) "My company commanders, who were waiting for it, immediately went out to reconnoitre their respective areas, while I had to attend a conference at Brigade headquarters, from which I returned about 8 p.m., and final orders to move off within two hours were issued. I found that during the reconnaissance the company commander and another officer of the right company had been knocked out by a shell. Very early that morning I had detailed Captain Roberts to occupy Crook Post with his company to support the 7th Sherwood Foresters, who had been ordered to attack Alarm Trench. He was placed under the orders of the Officer Commanding 7th Sherwood Foresters, and during the night relieved the latter battalion in occupation of the newly-captured Alarm Trench, and he remained here till my remaining two attacking companies formed up on right and left of him.

"At about 10 p.m. the Battalion started from Calonne, the companies detailed for the attack marching up the main Liévin—Lens road to meet the 7th Sherwood Foresters' guides. These guides lost their way, with the result that these two companies only reached the taped line of assembly one hour before zero hour. Owing to the darkness and the impossibility of obtaining guides from the 7th Sherwood Foresters, whose men had all been detailed for other urgent duties, the notice of the change of zero hour could not reach the centre company in time. This company accordingly advanced at the original zero hour and was subsequently caught by our own artillery barrage, which caused confusion and loss." (It appears that the orderly taking the message found on reaching Crook Post that the company had already left, was unable to deliver his message, and was then wounded.)

"The two officers of the right company collected all available men and pushed forward at zero hour towards their objective. The party on the right, under Second-Lieutenant Wildbore, pushed on till they reached the clump of trees, from which they drove the enemy, but found themselves unable to go further, as the enemy were holding the houses, as well as the railway running south-east from there and also the houses on the Liévin—Lens road. As the further advance was checked by machine gun and rifle fire, Second-Lieutenant Wildbore established a strong point and cleared the trenches round it of the enemy. The remainder of the company consolidated Alarm Trench.

Digitized by Google



The Sherwood Foresters
East limit of British Occupation 6p.m. 30·6·17
British Attack 2·47 a.m. 1·7·17. Our men located 6·30. XXX
German Counter Attack 7 a.m.
Troops 5 p.m. 1·7·17. British in Aconite.
British and Germans in Citè du Moulin.

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
ASTOR, LENOX
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS

Digitized by Google

"The left company, 'D,' under Captain Gamble, advanced at the zero hour, but, owing to the darkness, they were unable to get into touch with the battalion on the left, and so a platoon was extended to the left. This platoon seems to have advanced to the railway junction and to have worked up the German trenches towards the line N.13. Lieutenant Martin, with his platoon, reached the junction of Aloof and Colza Trenches, and Captain Gamble and the remaining platoon reached the houses in the road running approximately east and west from N.13. These were full of Germans, who poured out in the darkness, and very severe fighting took place. Second-Lieutenant Cowley, of the left platoon, was killed, while Captain Wright was wounded and also Captain Gamble, the company losing 3 officers and 76 other ranks of the 4 officers and 116 non-commissioned officers and men who went into action. Second-Lieutenant Martin cut his way through with the remainder of his men and two Lewis guns towards the centre company, which he rejoined in Alarm Trench.

"The centre company had very severe fighting round the houses in N.13. Captain Roberts, M.C., himself alone shot fifteen Germans; this officer had early sent forward a Lewis gun and patrols under Second-Lieutenant Davis, who sent in a report that he was in touch with the 5th Sherwood Foresters and the company on his left, that he had reached N.13 and had lighted flares, that there was a gap of 200 yards between the centre and right company, and that his casualties had been fairly heavy. Captain Roberts thinks that Second-Lieutenant Davis's position was much more to the right than the point mentioned. This officer is believed to have been killed soon after.

"Captain Roberts held on with the remains of his company and of the left company, together with a party of the 5th Sherwood Foresters and the bulk of the right company, and occupied a line approximately following the railway and running from N.13 to N.19, with a party under Second-Lieutenant Wildbore at N.19. I reinforced him with my reserve company under Second-Lieutenant Shaw, a local barrage was put up and a strong point established at the trench junction, thus securing the trench running approximately north-west and south-east through it. This frontage the Battalion was able to hold until ordered to withdraw, preparatory to relief by Canadians. A great deal of work had been done in consolidating the advanced position and in deepening the trenches leading thereto. By nightfall on the 2nd the line was, in compliance with orders, withdrawn to the line of the Alarm Trench, with bombing posts in front of it and on the Lens—Liévin road.

"The fighting on the morning of the 1st was very severe, and resulted in the loss of 5 officers and 178 other ranks, in addition to the two officers who became casualties during the preliminary reconnaissance. Captains Roberts and Gamble, Second-Lieutenants Martin, Wildbore, Cowley (believed killed) and Davis (believed killed) were conspicuous in the fighting, while Second-Lieutenant Shaw, who relieved Captain Roberts, did excellent work in consolidating the position with the help of Second-Lieutenants Edwards, Giles, Wildbore and Martin. The men behaved most gallantly, and detailed recommendations will follow later.

"The operations were very much hampered by the darkness of the night and the impossibility of recognizing landmarks. Every effort was made to

Digitized by Google

reconnoitre the ground, but it was impossible to do it in the time, nor could efficient guides be obtained.

"The officers and men of the Battalion have done all that I could have expected of them. A report has reached me that the men who are unaccounted for died fighting to the last, but I have not had time to verify it."

This report may now be supplemented by the account given in the Battalion diary: from this it appears that "C," the centre company, not having been told of the alteration in zero hour, attacked at 2.23 a.m. on July 1st and was caught in our barrage, obtaining some shelter behind a railway embankment, but suffering loss; when the barrage lifted and the company again advanced, the proper direction was lost and the majority of the men went too far to their left. Then at the new zero hour—2.47—when the attack commenced, it was still very dark, as rain had fallen and there were heavy clouds about; and as there was no telephone communication with the front in this sector and the runners had not had time to make themselves acquainted with the ground, news of what was happening could not be quickly obtained. The first authentic report received at Battalion headquarters came from Captain Gamble, commanding "D," the left company, who had come back wounded in the arm and chest, and who stated that most of his company had reached their objective (Colza Trench) and had even in places overrun it, as it was almost obliterated by gun fire, and consequently practically unrecognizable. He feared, too, that some men had gone too far to the left with "C" Company, owing to the fact that nothing could be seen of the 5th Battalion, and owing further to the ground being broken as it was by three sets of railway lines running transversely across it. He had been wounded by a bomb thrown by the enemy in some houses he was searching.

No more news came in till about 6.30, when a message was received from Captain Roberts to the effect that the Germans had counter-attacked, that he was back on the assembly line with what was left of his company and a platoon of "D" under Second-Lieutenant Martin, and that bombs and ammunition were needed. These were sent up with a party of the 8th Battalion.

So far nothing had been heard of the right flank and the 139th Brigade, so about 10 a.m. Lieut.-Colonel Bradshaw went up to the front, with "B" Company under Second-Lieutenant Shaw, to clear up the situation; while he was absent orders from the Brigadier were received to consolidate the general line, and to form a defensive flank for the 137th Brigade on the right, as the Germans had heavily counter-attacked and driven it back to the line of assembly. However, "A" was already to a not inconsiderable extent holding this line, but was unable to advance as the railway line was thickly occupied by the enemy, who had also a machine gun in a house on the left.

Meanwhile it was reported by wounded men trickling back from the front, that Second-Lieutenants Cowley and Davis had been killed on our extreme left flank, and that most of "C" and "D" Companies had been cut up by strong German parties which had come out from some houses and taken them in rear; here Company Sergeant-Majors Rowe and Harrison had also fallen. Later, Captain Wright and Second-Lieutenant Groves, 6th Battalion, came down wounded from the left, and it was afterwards learnt that the latter officer and a

Digitized by Google

(Photo, Imperial War Museum.

LENS, NORTH END.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

few men had captured two German light machine guns, but, being unable to bring them away, had smashed them up and left them in a shell-hole.

About 11 p.m. on July 2nd the 2nd Sherwood Foresters were relieved by a French Canadian battalion, and withdrew—mainly over the level, being very lucky in not being shelled *en route*. About 3 a.m. on the 3rd billets were reached in Bully Grenay, where orders were waiting that the Battalion was now to go back to the 71st Infantry Brigade and into Divisional Reserve at Verquin, and thither the Foresters proceeded by "bus" at 5 in the afternoon.

The following message, dated July 3rd, was received by the General Officer Commanding 6th Division, from Major-General Thwaites, Commanding 46th Division:—

"I desire to thank you most heartily for the great assistance given to this Division by your Artillery and the 2nd Sherwoods and 9th Norfolks in connection with the recent operations in front of Lens from 28th June to 1st July.

"The part taken by the 2nd Sherwoods, when they gained and held on to the ground captured, stood out alone. I regret very much the losses they sustained.

"Will you kindly convey to the units concerned our great appreciation of the support which they rendered.

The casualties in the Battalion had been sufficiently serious during the operations of June 30th and July 1st, 3 officers and 15 non-commissioned officers and men being killed or having died of wounds, 4 officers and 45 other ranks were wounded and 118 men were missing—a total of 183 casualties out of a trench strength of 529 all ranks. The officers who were killed or died of wounds were Second-Lieutenants A. L. Connor, A. Cowley and W. H. Davis, while the names of the four who were wounded were Captains G. M. Gamble, F. E. Gauntlett and F. E. Wright, and Second-Lieutenant P. C. C. Martin.

On the day that our 2nd Battalion came out of the line the Commanding Officer was informed that in view of the expected visit of His Majesty the King to the neighbourhood the Battalion was to provide a Guard of Honour, and that steps should at once be taken for the selection of the men; no time was lost, and on July 4th the men to form the guard were chosen from the four companies, the men selected were handed over to Major Wylie, D.S.O., for training, and did one hour's "ceremonial" daily. Captain Roberts, M.C., was to command the guard, with Second-Lieutenants Shaw and Wildbore as subalterns.

There were several alterations in the date of the Royal visit, but finally, on the 10th, it was definitely announced that it would take place next day, and His Majesty having given out that he hoped to see as many of his troops as possible during his visit to the First Army, portions of the route along which the King was to pass were allotted to different units, and the Battalion was given a position on the southern side of the main Bruay—Béthune road about 500 yards west of Hesdigneul village. The Guard, 3 officers, 100 other ranks, drums and bugles, were taken by 'buses at 10.30 a.m. on the 11th from Verquin Church to the First Army advanced headquarters at Ranchicourt, and on the conclusion of the ceremony returned by the same way.

On July 14th the following Special Order of the Day was issued by His Majesty the King:—

Digitized by Google

"Officers, Non-commissioned Officers and Men:

"On the conclusion of my fourth visit to the British Armies in the field, I leave you with feelings of admiration and gratitude for past achievements and of confidence in future efforts.

"On all sides I have witnessed the scenes of your triumphs.

"The battlefields of the Somme, the Ancre, Arras, Vimy and Messines have shown me what great results can be attained by the courage and devotion of all arms and services under efficient commanders and staffs.

"Nor do I forget the valuable work done by the various departments behind the fighting line, including those who direct and man the highly-developed system of railways and other means of communication.

"Your comrades, too—the men and women of the industrial army at home—have claims on your remembrance for their untiring service in helping you to meet the enemy on terms which are not merely equal, but daily improving.

"It was a great pleasure to the Queen to accompany me, and to become personally acquainted with the excellent arrangements for the care of the sick and wounded, whose welfare is ever close to her heart.

"For the past three years the Armies of the Empire and workers in the home-lands behind them have risen superior to every difficulty and every trial.

"The splendid successes already gained, in concert with our gallant Allies, have advanced us well on the way towards the completion of the task we undertook.

"There are doubtless fierce struggles still to come and heavy strains on our endurance to be borne. But be the road before us long or short, the spirit and pluck which have brought you so far will never fail, and, under God's guidance, the final and complete victory of our just cause is assured.

"GEORGE, R.I."

This ceremonial—reminiscent of more peaceful days—being concluded, the Battalion went back the same evening to the front line, relieving the 1st Leicesters in the St. Elie left subsection. During this tour the Battalion—by reason of the weakness of "C" and "D" Companies, which between them had sustained the larger proportion of the casualties incurred in the recent fighting—was organized in three companies, and one company of the 9th Norfolks was told off as Battalion support. "We heard definitely during this tour," so runs the war diary, "that the Division was being relieved by the Canadians, and that we were going out for a rest and training for probably one month."

These agreeable anticipations were not disappointed, for on the 24th—Captain and Temporary Lieutenant-Colonel H. Tylden-Wright, Derbyshire Yeomanry, having joined for duty the previous evening—the Battalion, on relief by the 7th (Robin Hood) Battalion of the Regiment, marched via Noeux-les-Mines, Frevillers and Herlin to Chelers, where accommodation, of an indifferent kind, was afforded in billets.

Thus "the Division was relieved after a continuous tour on the Loos front of just under five months—a period of particularly bitter and severe trench warfare. Trench-mortaring was continuous on both sides on the greater part of the front held, and shelling heavy. The artillery suffered no less severely than the infantry, owing to the very restricted choice of positions, and the advantages

Digitized by Google

of the observation enjoyed by the enemy. Raids and counter-raids were numerous. An analysis of the diary shows that during the six months from the end of January to the end of July the Division carried out thirty raids, of which thirteen were successful in obtaining their objective and securing prisoners (total for the thirteen raids—54), eleven secured their objective but failed to yield any prisoners, and only six definitely failed. During the same period the enemy attempted twenty-one raids, of which only four succeeded in taking any prisoners, five entered our trenches without securing any prisoners, and twelve were entire failures. Three of the enemy's attempted raids yielded us prisoners, and four yielded identifications. The low average of prisoners taken by us in successful raids is attributable to two causes—first, the extraordinary precautions taken by the enemy in the latter part of the period to avoid losing prisoners by evacuating his trenches on the slightest alarm or remaining in his dug-outs, and secondly the fierceness engendered in our troops by the severity of the bombardment, and particularly of the trench-mortaring to which they were normally subjected."*

During the past five months above reviewed the 2nd Battalion Sherwood Foresters had taken part in none of the great battles of that period, but none the less casualties daily mounted up, and by the end of the fifth month they totalled in all ranks 67 killed and 302 wounded.

* *Short History of the 6th Division*, pp. 31, 32.

Digitized by Google

Map 4

CHAPTER V.

AUGUST—DECEMBER, 1917.

Battle Honour:
"*Cambrai*, 1917."

IN the Monchy—Le Breton area the 6th Division remained "resting" during the whole month of August, undergoing hard training, engaged in rifle meetings and taking part in battalion and inter-regimental sports of all kinds; the weather was not specially propitious, a good deal of rain falling during the four weeks or so that the Division was out of the line, but all ranks were greatly benefited and refreshed by the long rest.

During August the commands of both the 6th Division and 71st Infantry Brigades changed hands, Major-General Charles Ross being relieved by Major-General T. O. Marden, C.M.G., on the 19th, while on the following day Brigadier-General P. W. Brown, D.S.O., took the place of Brigadier-General Feetham, who left to assume the command of the 39th Division, at the head of which he was killed in March, 1918.

At the end of this month Major Wylie was posted as second-in-command of the 11th Battalion Essex Regiment, while Major C. H. Dumbell, of our Regiment, assumed the duties of second-in-command of the Battalion. At this time the company commanders were: "A," Captain Shaw; "B," Captain Cowgill; "C," Lieutenant Byles; and "D," Lieutenant Vinall. On August 24th the Division commenced the relief of the Canadians on the Hill 70 front, the 16th and 18th Infantry Brigades commencing the relief by taking over a new line between Loos and St. Elie; and a few days later the 71st Brigade followed suit, when the Battalion marched to Braquemont in the Noeux-les-Mines area and went into Divisional Reserve.

During the time, from September 4th—9th, that the Battalion was holding the line in the right sub-sector of the divisional front, and at that particular part of it known by the unpleasant, but no doubt sufficiently descriptive, name of Bug Alley, near Loos, preparations were made for a small raid on two German posts in front of "A" and "B" Companies. Major Dumbell was charged with all the arrangements for the raid, and it had at first been intended to hold the two posts when captured, but this was altered, and the plans had to be changed at the last moment. During the 9th the enemy harassed our front line trenches with minnenwerfers, aerial darts and rifle grenades, and a great deal of damage was caused, completely obliterating an important junction and part of the only communication trench up to the front line; while in addition a German aeroplane flew low over the line—all the usual signs of a coming enemy raid. The men in the trenches had little or no cover and were under fire all day, incurring many casualties, and were hardly in the best trim to carry out the proposed raid,

Digitized by Google

especially as the left party would have to go through wire which *should* have been cut by Stokes mortars, but which up to 5 p.m. was untouched. The raid was to have started at 11.55 p.m. on the 9th, but at the same hour the Germans began one against our left; this was, however, driven back, but on our left party going forward under Second-Lieutenant Giles, a line of Germans was found lying on the ground just in front of their wire, and the party had to retire, after throwing all their bombs.

The right party advanced as ordered, but found the German posts deserted.

On September 16th Major Dumbell, D.S.O., was appointed to command the 11th Battalion Essex Regiment, and Major Tylden-Wright took his place as second-in command of the Battalion.

"On the 24th September the Division side-stepped into the Cité St. Emile area, just north of Lens, and commenced operations for an attack north of Lens, to be carried out in conjunction with the projected attack by the Canadian Corps on Sallaumines Hill. This project was, however, abandoned."*

When very early in October the Battalion went up to the front line once more, it found itself detailed for Brigade reserve in the area known as Black Watch Alley, moving thither from Les Brebis; and the diary of this date gives some idea of the terrible condition of the communications.

"It was pitch dark," we read, "and a gale was blowing, and practically all the roads except the pavé were awash with water, this being particularly the case through North Maroc. . . . On the night of the 9th—10th the Battalion relieved the 11th Essex in the left section of the Auguste sector, while Battalion headquarters moved from Bug Alley to Nash Alley. Owing to the weakness of the Battalion a company of the 1st Leicesters was put under Colonel Bradshaw's orders. Three of our companies went into the front line and one in close support. . . . Relief was not completed till about 4 a.m.; this was due to the guides losing their way, and to the very bad condition of the communication trenches. *Two men of 'D' Company got stuck fast and had to be dug out with entrenching tools, two men of 'C' Company had their boots torn to pieces in trying to get their feet out of the mud, and two others fainted.* As far as the enemy were concerned, the tour was fairly quiet, though the trench held by 'D' Company was several times blown in by 'Minnies.' Ration-carrying and communication with the front line was most difficult, and a certain amount of rations was lost." When time for relief came, we read that "the condition of the trenches was perhaps even worse than when we went in, so relief had to be over the top the whole way. It was somewhat"—this adverb probably rather understates the case!—"delayed by hostile shelling."

When next the Battalion went up to the trenches—this time in the St. Emile right subsection—the bodies were recovered of two or three men of the Foresters who were missing on July 1st; "they had got a great deal further than they should have, and some distance to the left of their objective; they belonged to 'C' and 'D' Companies. The body of an officer, believed to be that of Second-Lieutenant Cowley, was also found in the lines of the battalion on the right (2nd/5th North Staffords), but no identification could be found."

On October 19th, when the commanding officer and adjutant were visiting

* *Short History of the 6th Division*, pp. 33, 34.

Digitized by Google

the front about 3.30 p.m., the enemy opened an intense "Minnie" barrage on the front of the left battalion, the 9th Suffolks, whose line appeared to be obliterated, and later in the evening, on Colonel Bradshaw going to the support company, "B" of the Foresters, to get them to form a defensive flank in view of possible eventualities, he and Captain Cowgill were wounded by a shell, Colonel Bradshaw in the right leg and Captain Cowgill in the back of the head. The commanding officer refused to fall to the rear until about 8 p.m., when he walked back to his headquarters and had dinner, but was then obliged to go to the dressing station, and was later admitted to hospital. Three "other ranks" were also wounded this day.

Towards the end of the month the 6th Division was relieved by the 11th and was withdrawn into rest in the St. Hilaire area, west of Lillers, and accordingly, on the 21st, the Battalion marched to Les Brebis for the night, and next day about noon proceeded to the railway station at Noeux-les-Mines, passed through Mazingarbe, where was the 9th Battalion of the Regiment, and being greeted by an enemy shell near Noeux-les-Mines, which exploded about ten feet from "D" Company, but fortunately caused no casualties. Entraining here, Lillers was reached about 4 p.m., and thence the Battalion marched to Westrehem, where it was in reserve, and where something over a week was spent in intensive training for certain active and important operations in which the 6th Division was to be called upon to play its part.

On October 28th, then, orders were received that the Division was to move to an area south-east of St. Pol, and instructions were issued that officers' kits were to be reduced to a minimum weight of 35 lb., all surplus being sent to store at Noeux-les-Mines.

Starting from Westrehem at 8.25 on the morning of the 29th, the 2nd Battalion marched by way of Nedonchelle and Bailleul-aux-Cornailles to Beaufort, which was reached soon after midnight on the 30th, the men being in full marching order with steel helmets, and stepping out well.

"Ours," says the Battalion diary with a not unnatural pride, "was the only battalion which was not followed by an ambulance."

At a late hour of the last day of the month of October three drafts of 176 untrained men of various categories arrived, and were posted to companies.

On November 6th what was known as the Third Battle of Ypres, which had been in progress throughout the months of August, September and October, came finally to an end with the taking of Passchendaele, and though many of the German divisions had been broken in the continuous fighting, and the enemy losses, both moral and material, had been very heavy, the winter months were now rapidly approaching during which operations on any large scale must practically be abandoned, thus affording the Germans ample time to rest and refit; while in preparation for any offensive which the Central Powers might contemplate in the spring, Germany might reasonably hope to add many more divisions to her western armies in addition to those which she had already withdrawn from her eastern frontier, where the Russian menace had now practically ceased to function.

Italy, too, was at this time in somewhat desperate straits on the Piave, and was urgently calling for an Allied diversion, and the British Commander in the

Digitized by Google

West now determined upon something of the nature of a surprise attack, assisted by tactics of a novel and unexpected kind.

The reasons for the point of attack selected are given in the Field-Marshal's despatch of February 20th, 1918, and may here be quoted at some length :—

"Our repeated attacks in Flanders, and those of our Allies elsewhere, had brought about large concentrations of the enemy's forces on the threatened fronts, with a consequent reduction in the garrisons of certain other sectors of his line. Of these weakened sectors the Cambrai front had been selected as most suitable for the surprise operation in contemplation. The ground there was, on the whole, favourable for the employment of tanks, which were to play an important part in the enterprise, and facilities existed for the concealment of the necessary preparations for the attack.

"If, after breaking through the German defence systems on this front, we could secure Bourlon to the north and establish a good flank position to the east in the direction of Cambrai, we should be well placed to exploit the situation locally between Bourlon and the Sensée River and to the north-west. The capture of Cambrai itself was subsidiary to this operation, the object of our advance towards that town being primarily to cover our flank and puzzle the enemy regarding our intentions. The enemy was laying out fresh lines of defence behind those which he had already completed on the Cambrai front; and it was to be expected that his troops would be redistributed as soon as our pressure in Flanders was relaxed."

The ground over which the Cambrai offensive was carried out has been thus described: *"That section of the Siegfried Line which lay in front of Havrincourt Wood, between the Bapaume—Cambrai road and the Scheldt Canal was a country of rolling downs, grey with the withered grasses of November, and patched with the rank and blackened growths of thistle, and dock, and ragwort which spring up on land once closely tilled and now derelict. From any ridge east of Bapaume the observer could grasp the terrain at a glance. Eight miles from our front rose the spires and factory chimneys of the town of Cambrai. Half-way the deep cutting of the Scheldt Canal zigzagged across the landscape, for the most part empty of water, but forming a better barrier than any running stream. On the western side of the canal the long Flesquières Ridge ran north and south, rising on the left to the dominating point of Bourlon Wood between the Arras and Bapaume roads—a wood of oak and ash, with a dense undergrowth, and still untouched by shell fire. East of the canal the ground fell away to the flat plains of the Scheldt, but the village of Rumilly offered a flank position on the last incline of the uplands."

The area was well suited for a surprise offensive including the use on a large scale of tanks; these could be easily concealed behind or in the big woods covering the country, while the ground was dry and open and favourable to their unhindered advance.

The German defences on this front had been greatly improved and extended since the opening of our offensive in April, and comprised three main systems of resistance.

* Buchan, *A History of the Great War*, vol. IV, p. 88.

Digitized by Google

"The first of these three trench systems, constituting part of the Hindenburg Line proper, ran in a general north-westerly direction for a distance of six miles from the Scheldt Canal at Banteux to Havrincourt. There it turned abruptly north along the line of the Canal du Nord for a distance of four miles to Mœuvres, thus forming a pronounced salient in the German front. In advance of the Hindenburg Line the enemy had constructed a series of strong forward positions, including La Vacquerie and the north-east corner of Havrincourt Wood. Behind it, and at a distance respectively varying from a little less to rather more than a mile, and from 3½ to 4½ miles, lay the second and third main German systems, known as the Hindenburg Reserve Line, and the Beaurevoir, Masnières, Marquion Lines."*

Briefly, Sir Douglas Haig's plan was to smash the German salient, to occupy the high ground overlooking Cambrai, to push cavalry through the gap in order to disorganize communications and the arrival of reinforcements, and to roll up the enemy's defences to the north-west.

The conduct of the operations was entrusted to General the Hon. Sir J. Byng, who had recently taken the place of General Allenby in command of the Third Army, which had not been seriously engaged since the Battle of Arras. The main front of attack extended for six miles, and was occupied from left to right by the 36th, 62nd, 51st, 6th, 20th and 12th Divisions, while on the left, in the Bullecourt area, the 16th and 3rd Divisions were to carry out a subsidiary attack. In immediate support in the main area of the attack was the 29th Division, while the 1st, 2nd, 4th and 5th Cavalry Divisions were at hand, ready to exploit any success which might be gained.

The enemy was here, at the outbreak of the battle, in inferior strength, for he had only eleven divisions in line—the German Second Army, under von der Marwitz—while actually in the threatened area he had no more than six, three in line and three in support, though a seventh was in process of arriving from the Eastern front.

The 6th Division, in the IIIrd Corps, was directed to attack on the front Villers Plouich—Beaucamp, with the 71st Infantry Brigade on the left, next to the 51st Division, and the 16th Infantry Brigade on the right, next to the 20th Division. These two brigades were to advance about 3,000 yards to the first objective (Ribécourt and spur to south-east of it) and another 1,000 yards to the second objective—the German support system. The 18th Brigade was ordered to advance through the 71st and secure the third objective about a mile further on (Premy Chapel Ridge), throwing back a defensive flank towards Flesquières for the further operations of the 51st Division on its left, and securing the flank of the 29th Division on its right. The latter division, passing through the right of the 6th and left of the 20th Divisions, was charged with securing the crossings of the St. Quentin Canal at Marcoing and Masnières and of seizing the high ground at Rumilly, thus facilitating exploitation to the south-east, preventing a concentration against the widely-stretched defensive flanks of the IIIrd Corps, and threatening Cambrai.

"Opposite the 6th Division the Hindenburg Line commenced with an outpost line 750 yards distant on the left and 250 yards on the right. This was out

* Despatch of February 20th, 1918.

Digitized by Google

of sight of our front trenches by reason of the curve of the ground. Half a mile behind this came the main system, consisting of two trenches 200 yards apart, the whole guarded by most formidable belts of wire about 150 yards in depth. The interval between outpost and main systems was sown with well-sited and concealed machine gun positions. A mile further on, and on the opposite side of the valley for the most part, ran the support system, similar to the main system. One and a half miles further back again was the reserve system, of which only machine gun dug-outs were completed, and a small amount of wire had been erected.

"Two battalions of tanks, each of 36 tanks, were allotted to the Division. 'B' Battalion operated with the 6th Infantry Brigade, and 'H' Battalion with the 71st Infantry Brigade. The 18th Brigade advanced without tanks. The only points which caused anxiety, provided that the tanks functioned properly, were Couillet Wood on the right of the 16th Brigade front, in which tanks could not operate, and Ribécourt village on the left of the 71st Infantry Brigade front."*

The first two weeks of November in the Beaufort area were occupied in training for the battle now commencing, and several exercises were practised of attacks on trenches by tanks and infantry, special trenches having been dug and unusually thick belts of wire having been erected for the purpose; it was therefore November 15th before the Division commenced its march to the Cambrai front. On the morning of this day the 2nd Battalion Sherwood Foresters moved from Beaufort by way of Frevent, Péronne and Manancourt, to a camp in Dessart Wood, where the 17th and 18th were passed, and then, on the 19th, the Battalion, having drawn battle equipment and stores, moved up in relief of the 9th Norfolks to an assembly position near Beaucamp, one platoon from "C" and "D" Companies being sent forward into No Man's Land to take up an outpost line that night.

The following are extracts from Operation Orders issued on November 18th:—

"The 6th Division is to carry out an attack on a date and at a time to be notified later. The 20th Division will be on its right and the 51st on its left. The 29th Division will be in Corps Reserve. The 6th Division is attacking with the 16th Infantry Brigade on the right and the 71st on the left. . . . The 71st Infantry Brigade will attack in three waves:—

"(*a*) First wave, consisting of the 1st Battalion Leicestershire Regiment and 9th Battalion Suffolk Regiment, will attack and capture the Hindenburg front line system.

"(*b*) The second wave, consisting of the 9th Battalion Norfolk Regiment and half 2nd Battalion Sherwood Foresters, will attack and capture the Blue Line. Half Battalion Sherwood Foresters on right and 9th Battalion Norfolk Regiment on left.

"(*c*) The third wave, consisting of the 11th Service Battalion The Essex Regiment and 2nd Battalion Sherwood Foresters will attack and capture the Brown Line, the 2nd Battalion Sherwood Foresters on the right and 11th Battalion Essex Regiment on the left."

* *Short History of the 6th Division*, p. 38

Digitized by Google

The different objectives were thus indicated: the capture of the Hindenburg Front and immediate Support Line; the capture of the Blue Line, viz., the village of Ribécourt and the trench running from the bridge over the canal; the capture of the Brown Line, viz., the Hindenburg Support System between certain points marked on the map.

Zero hour for the operations was fixed at 6.30 a.m. on November 20th, when the 9th Suffolks, preceded by three tanks, passed through the Foresters, who then followed on in rear. The enemy barrage put up in reply to that of the British was scattered but heavy, especially on "B" Company's line, resulting in several casualties to the attacking troops. Lieutenant Brown, originally a sergeant in the Foresters and who had only just received authority to wear captain's badges while commanding "B" Company, was engaged in laying footboards in the trench to help "D" Company to cross, when he was hit by a shell and killed. Captain Shaw, who had only very recently returned from leave and was unable to get up to and take command of his company—"A"—was placed in command of "B" just as it went "over the top" under Second-Lieutenant Fielding.

"C" and "D" Companies led the attack on the first objective, followed by "A" and "B" and three tanks which were attacking the second objective. Battalion headquarters moved up in rear of "C" and "D" and was established in the support line of the Hindenburg front line system. "A" and "B" went over behind their tanks in good order and at the appointed time; and about 9 a.m. a message was received from "C" Company that they had gained their first objective, and in evidence of their success they passed back an officer and about 20 men as prisoners. This company also captured five machine guns without very much opposition, although the tanks, owing to the nature of the ground, were not able to afford them much support, if indeed any.

"D" Company charged home on their objective with the bayonet, killing 12 of the enemy and taking the same number prisoners. The advance had in general been so rapid that few messages filtered back; but about 10.55 a.m. the situation appeared to be much as follows: "B" and "D" Companies were in position and consolidating the Brown Line on the left, "C" was consolidating the support line, but "A" had apparently gone too far and had missed the objective; touch had been established with the 11th Essex on the left, and a patrol had gone out to get communication with the battalion on the right. Orders were sent to recall "A" Company, and at noon it was reported that the whole Battalion was in position and consolidating, and that touch had been joined with the right battalion.

The advance to the Brown Line had been one of some 4,500 yards, during which, while the casualties had been 1 officer and 8 other ranks killed, 1 officer and 30 other ranks wounded, the resulting captures had been 4 officers, including a regimental commander, and 290 non-commissioned officers and men, with 10 machine guns, also much material and stores of all kinds.

Special mention should here be made of the services in this attack of Lieutenant Edwards, the bombing officer of the Battalion, who had been attached to "D" Company with special orders to keep the Battalion in touch with the left of the Brigade on its right. Crossing No Man's Land he ran into

Digitized by Google

two enemy machine guns which were causing loss, and Lieutenant Edwards captured both these, together with their crews, practically single-handed. It was unfortunate that a few days later this officer was hit by a fragment of shrapnel and seriously injured and incapacitated.

During that night reports came in that Flesquières had not been taken, and that counter-attacks by the enemy might be expected from the direction of that town; dispositions to meet such a contingency were made but nothing developed, and during the night the enemy evacuated the village of Ribécourt.

Of the fighting earlier in the day for the possession of this group of houses, an historian* writes: "the losses of the Division were light, as their instructions were to dig in upon the further side of the village and act as a connecting link. The Foresters, however, had at least one sharp tussle before they gained their full objective. A shock battalion charged them, and there was a period of desperate fighting during which the Germans displayed a valour which sometimes was almost that of fanatics. 'One of their companies was cut off. We offered them quarter, but they would not hear of it. The last to go was a young sub. When he saw that all was up he drew his revolver and shot himself. As he fell I ran forward in the hope to save him, for he was a brave lad. When I got to his side he looked at me with a look of intense hatred and tried to take aim with his pistol. It fell from his hand, and he fell dead with that look of hatred still on his face.'"

In the course of the night the 1st Cavalry Division passed through and, in conjunction with the 29th Division, seized Noyelles.

About 9 o'clock on the morning of the 21st the Battalion was directed to be ready to move at short notice into Divisional Reserve at Marcoing, and all packed up and stood ready, while Second-Lieutenant Edwards and two non-commissioned officers were sent to reconnoitre the approaches to Marcoing, and returned reporting that place in British hands, but the situation in Masnières was not clear. No further orders were received, but as far as could be gathered the British line now seemed to run Marcoing—Noyelles—Containg—Anneux—Graincourt, with fighting going on in Bourlon Wood; but on the Battalion front matters remained undisturbed until 6 p.m., when a message was received to the effect that the Germans had re-entered Fontaine and were threatening Containg.

On the evening of the 22nd Lieutenant-Colonel H. M. Milward, D.S.O., of the Regiment, came from the 17th Service Battalion to take command of the 2nd, but was ordered by the Brigadier to remain in rear at the transport lines until the operations closed. He actually assumed command on the 25th.

From the 23rd to the 26th the situation on the 6th Division front remained very much the same—the 16th Brigade being in the line about Noyelles, the 18th in support on Premy Chapel Ridge, with the 71st Brigade in reserve in the Hindenburg support system; but on other parts of the front heavy fighting went on, especially about Fontaine, Bourlon and Bourlon Wood.

On the 26th the 71st Brigade moved up to the support position, and next day the Foresters relieved the battalion which had been occupying the Premy Chapel Ridge and things remained quiet enough until November 30th, on the morning of which day a very heavy barrage opened on Bourlon Wood,

* Conan Doyle, vol. IV, pp. 246, 247.

Digitized by Google

extending over the whole battle front. For some time no news of the situation was forthcoming, and it was thought that the left flank of the Division was in danger, but later—at 10.30 a.m.—reports came in from "B" Company that troops could be seen coming from the direction of Masnières, though whether these were our men retiring or the enemy advancing was not yet clear. An hour later information was to hand that the Germans had attacked and broken through on the Marcoing—Masnières front and were threatening the right flank and rear of the Division, and the Battalion was now ordered to take up a position on the southern slope of the Premy Chapel Ridge overlooking Marcoing; this was carried out about noon—"A" and "C" Companies in front, "B" in support and "D" in reserve. This move was, however, observed by the many German aeroplanes which had all day been busy over the Battalion front, and the result was heavy shelling by enemy guns by which Captain Byles, commanding "C" Company, Second-Lieutenants Edwards and Trohear, 2 sergeants and 24 men were wounded.

Things looked anything but satisfactory at this period; patrols were sent into Marcoing, who reported that the place was in our hands now but had that morning been entered by the enemy, who were later ejected. Then about 3 in the afternoon our troops could be seen moving about on the ridge between Marcoing and Masnières; later it was rumoured that we were in possession of both these towns; and later again that the enemy had made a very strong offensive on our right and right rear and had broken through the original British front line, capturing Gonnelieu and Gouzeaucourt, divisional headquarters and the Battalion transport getting away only just in time. The situation did away with all hope of relief, and the 71st Brigade remained on in its position.

The initial operations of the Cambrai Battle had been very successful, and led to the receipt by the Commander-in-Chief of the following congratulatory message from His Majesty the King, dated November 27th:—

"I congratulate you, General Byng and the troops concerned, on the successful operations in the neighbourhood of Cambrai. The complete surprise effected under such novel conditions of warfare has been received with the utmost satisfaction throughout the Empire, while holding out great hopes for the future. It is especially gratifying that the tanks, a purely British invention, should have played so important a part in your victory."

Though the Battalion was not again seriously engaged during the remainder of the period covered by the Cambrai operations, the strain on all ranks continued to be very great, and some idea of this may be gathered from the extracts which follow from the war diary of those anxious days:—

"December 1st. The morning was quiet and the general situation improved. About 2.30 p.m. the Germans were reported massing between Containg and Noyelles, and they opened a barrage on that front. . . . We were ordered to take up positions on north side of Premy Chapel Ridge facing Containg. The enemy attack died down and we resumed our previous positions about 4 p.m. in the right sub-sector (Noyelles). On the night of the 1st—2nd we relieved the 1st Leicesters and headquarters moved to Nine Wood—'A' Company on the right front, 'C' on left front in Noyelles, 'B' support between Noyelles and Nine Wood, and 'D' Company in reserve behind 'A.'

Digitized by Google

[*Photo, Imperial War Museum.*

A PARTY ON THE MENIN ROAD.

THE WATER TO THE RIGHT IS NOT A CANAL, IT IS MERELY A SERIES OF SHELL HOLES CAUSED BY SOME OF THE "HEAVIES" WHICH BURST CONTINUOUSLY IN THIS NEIGHBOURHOOD FOR FOUR-AND-A-HALF YEARS.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

"December 2nd. Intermittent shelling of Nine Wood, otherwise the situation on the divisional front was normal. During the day our front at Masnières was driven in and the line was adjusted to run from in front of Marcoing to the high ground to the west of Masnières. During the night our lines were consolidated and wire put out. A good deal of patrolling was also done.

"December 3rd. About 11 a.m. heard that the enemy were massing for attack between Marcoing and Masnières. The Brigade Major, however, informed us shortly after that things were going all right in that part of the front, and that the Germans were being held. Suddenly, at 3.50 p.m., a wire reached us that Operation Order 260 was to be carried out at once. This operation order had not been then received, but was received at 4 p.m. The orders it contained were that owing to the operations on our right flank we were to leave one company in Noyelles and form the remainder to the right. Orders were issued for 'C' to remain in Noyelles, 'A' to take up a line from L.110 to the south-east edge of Nine Wood, 'D' to continue this line in front of the south edge of the wood facing Marcoing, while 'B' Company was moved round to the Quarry in Nine Wood. . . . Outposts were put out in front of the line. It appears that Marcoing was believed to have been taken by the enemy. About 8 p.m. information was received that the 16th Brigade in Marcoing was intact, but it was decided to retire to the line of the canal and demolish all bridges, the line of the canal to be held by outposts, while the line of resistance was the Marcoing Ridge—Premy Chapel Ridge—Nine Wood. Our orders were to hold Nine Wood at all costs. Very cold during night with frost; new line dug in during the night.

"December 4th. German balloon was up in front of Containg and various aeroplanes came over our lines. The whole of the last week has been notable for the extraordinary concentration of enemy aeroplanes which constantly patrol our lines and for the conspicuous absence of our planes. Arrangements made during the day to blow up the bridges over the canal and the River Scheldt, and to put out wire in front of the new line south of Nine Wood. About 7 p.m. orders came to withdraw the line to the Hindenburg Support System. 'C' Company withdrew at 3 a.m. and the remainder followed at 3.30 a.m. on the 5th. We relieved the 2nd/8th Foresters in the portion of the support system to which we withdrew. . . . The withdrawal was successfully accomplished without hindrance from the Germans.

"December 5th—12th. Two companies—'A' and 'D'—were in the front line and two companies—'B' and 'C'—in the support line. Battle outposts were pushed out nightly well in advance, and officers' patrols were also sent out. Apart from one or two posts the enemy does not seem to have advanced much beyond Marcoing. A new outpost line was dug about 200 yards in front of the front line . . . and a good belt of wire put out in front of the outpost line. We have now been in action for over three weeks, and all ranks are getting very tired with the continual strain and hard work.

"The enemy has been exceptionally quiet on our front, but a heavy attack has been expected any day, probably from the direction of Flesquières and Gonnelieu. Ribécourt and the back areas have, however, been systematically

Digitized by Google

and heavily shelled. The weather has not been altogether favourable for flying, but enemy aircraft have been very active while few of ours are ever seen.

"On the 12th the Battalion was relieved by the 9th Cheshire Regiment, having been in action since November 20th—twenty-two days . . . and the Battalion withdrew to a canvas camp at Etricourt."

From here a move was made on the 14th, via Manancourt to Bailleulval, south-west of Arras, where the usual cleaning up and training set in with stereotyped severity.

During the months of November and December the losses sustained by the 2nd Battalion Sherwood Foresters amounted to: killed, 2 officers and 21 other ranks; wounded, 7 officers and 125 other ranks; while 2 men were missing—casualties which cannot be considered excessive in view of the length of time that the operations had endured and the severity and hand-to-hand character of much of the fighting.

At Bailleulval a draft of 60 joined the Battalion, and also the following officers: Captain Finch, Second-Lieutenants Benner, Cooper and Picton.

On Christmas Day the Battalion enjoyed a special dinner, and there was a distribution of parcels which had arrived from friends at home.

The results of the Cambrai Battle are thus summed up in Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig's despatch of February 20th, 1918:—

"We had captured and retained in our possession over 12,000 yards of former German front line from La Vacquerie to a point opposite Boursies, together with between 10,000 and 11,000 yards of the Hindenburg Line and Hindenburg Reserve Line and the villages of Ribécourt, Flesquières and Havrincourt. A total of 145 German guns were taken or destroyed by us in the course of the operations, and 11,000 German prisoners were captured.

"On the other hand, the enemy had occupied an unimportant section of our front line between Vendhuille and Gonnelieu.

"There is little doubt that our operations were of considerable indirect assistance to the Allied forces in Italy. Large demands were made upon the available German reserves at a time when a great concentration of German divisions was still being maintained in Flanders. There is evidence that the German divisions intended for the Italian theatre were diverted to the Cambrai front, and it is probable that the further concentration of German forces against Italy was suspended for at least three weeks at a most critical period, when our Allies were making their first stand on the Piave line."

In the following letter, published on December 15th of this year, the Corps Commander expressed his congratulations and thanks to all ranks of the 6th Division for their services during the Cambrai operations:—

"The Corps Commander wishes to thank all ranks of the 6th Division for the endurance shown under difficult circumstances and to congratulate the Division on its fighting qualities. The dash displayed by the troops on the 20th November, and the subsequent stubborn resistance to attack were of a high order, and equalled the reputation which the Division acquired in the first year of the war. The Corps Commander is especially gratified to testify this to a Division that he has been connected with for so many years."

Digitized by Google

Map 4

CHAPTER VI.

1918.

THE GREAT GERMAN OFFENSIVE AND THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME.

Battle Honours:

"St. Quentin"—"Bapaume."

THE first two months of the year 1918 passed under comparatively quiet and even peaceful conditions, and during the opening weeks at any rate there was no intimation or warning of the great and epoch-making events which were shortly to take place.

On New Year's Day the 2nd Battalion of our Regiment moved from Bailleulval to Courcelles-le-Comte and took over billets at No. 3 Camp from the 2nd York and Lancaster Regiment—the accommodation here being a great improvement upon that provided at Bailleulval. The Divisional Commander issued a report on the march discipline and general turn-out of the units composing his command, remarking of the 2nd Sherwood Foresters that "the general turn-out and march discipline of this Battalion was most satisfactory. The men marched well."

A course of intensive training was now commenced and special attention was devoted to the practice of the counter-attack—all of the very greatest value in the hard fighting which was to come. Then on January 13th the commanding officer was informed that the Battalion had been selected to provide a Guard of Honour of 3 officers and 100 other ranks for a medal distribution parade to take place on the 15th at Third Army Headquarters. Captain N. H. Beedham, M.C., Second-Lieutenants S. Gregory and H. V. Bright were the officers detailed for the guard, which proceeded by special train to Albert, and on the termination of this duty a very flattering letter was received from the Army Commander; it ran as follows:—

"The Army Commander would be glad if you would convey to the O.C. 2nd Notts and Derby Regiment his appreciation of the appearance and smartness of the Guard of Honour furnished by that Battalion on the occasion of the presentation of decorations by the Chief of the Belgian Mission."

On the same day the following officers joined or rejoined the Battalion:—Lieutenant Platt, Second-Lieutenants Hemstock, Nicholson and Bell, the first-named officer taking over command of "C" Company in place of Second-Lieutenant Sheldon, who assumed the office of assistant-adjutant. Three days later two more young officers—Second-Lieutenants Boothroyd and Eyre—joined.

On January 17th the 6th Division moved up and commenced the relief of the 51st Division in the front line between Hermies and Boursies, the Battalion marching some nine miles to Fremicourt and being accommodated, headquarters, "A" and "D" companies in that town, while "B" and "C" were

Digitized by Google

in a camp on the road leading to La Bucquière; but in the course of the afternoon the companies marched up to the line and took over the centre sub-section of the Brigade front on a line extending from Boursies to Demicourt. The outgoing battalion gave this sector a good character as an especially quiet one, having incurred only one casualty in two tours of duty, but the Foresters were not so fortunate, the enemy putting down a hostile barrage that very night, killing 5 men and wounding 2. Here the opposing lines were some 800 yards apart and the work to be carried out—and there was a great deal of it—could be done for the most part only by day; the trenches had fallen in badly after the thaw, and much wiring was needed.

On the night of January 22nd, Lieutenant Platt, while moving up to visit his posts on the Bapaume—Cambrai road, was badly wounded by a 77 mm. shell, his left hand being blown off; and on the 23rd Lieutenant-Colonel Milward took over temporary command of the 71st Infantry Brigade in the absence of Brigadier-General Brown on a month's leave, Major H. Tylden-Wright taking Colonel Milward's place with the Battalion.

By January 26th the Battalion was back in the neighbourhood of Fremicourt, headquarters and three companies at Lindop Camp, in the town, and the remaining company at Luck Camp, on the Bapaume road about three-quarters of a mile distant. The work here was heavy and continuous, working parties of 7 officers and 225 other ranks were found daily, while many men and non-commissioned officers were required for guards, anti-aircraft posts, Lewis gun courses and other duties. During this time of "rest," the weather being fine and clear and the moon being at the full, enemy air-bombing parties were very busy over the back areas, but the Battalion suffered no loss from these activities.

On the 6th and 7th two drafts from home, respectively 90 and 70 strong, joined the service companies: these were all little more than boys, youngsters just turned 19 years of age, but they appear to have made a good impression upon the war-hardened veterans among whom they had come, since mention of their advent in the official diary is, for such utterances, almost enthusiastic—"they seem a likely lot" is the verdict, and later on we shall see that these boys fought like men and died like heroes.

About February 20th the 6th Division side-stepped northward and relieved the 25th Division in the Lagnicourt area, and here something of a misfortune befell the Battalion by reason of the men not having had time to get well acquainted with the ground; the following is taken from the war diary:—

"On the 21st a headquarters runner, Private Greenhalgh, who had been to the headquarters 2nd/5th North Staffs on our left with the detail for our patrols for the night, and was bringing this back, apparently missed his way and walked into the German lines. Owing to the configuration of the ground he was not observed crossing our lines and was first seen about 300 yards out. The sentries were unable to attract his attention and he was seen to be captured by three Germans. Lewis gun fire was opened, and Private Greenhalgh and one of the Germans was seen to fall. Unfortunately the message he was carrying from the 2nd/5th North Staffs disclosed the identity of two (British) divisions."

Digitized by Google

On the next night an attempt was made to capture the post at which Private Greenhalgh had been made prisoner, and a party of 20 men went out at 8 p.m. under Second-Lieutenant Eyre, but the post was found unoccupied.

The Battalion was relieved in the trenches on February 28th—March 1st, after a tour which had been exceptionally quiet, and, except for a little rain, the weather had been unusually fine.

During the past few months the Allies had gained certain by no means negligible successes in almost all the other and more distant theatres of war, but these unfortunately could exert only an indirect effect upon the progress of the war in Europe, and here the balance of power had now tilted against us and our allies. Russia was practically out of the war and no longer to be taken into account, while Roumania, the last to enter the field on the side of the Western Powers, had been overwhelmed and compelled to make terms, and thus the whole strength of Germany and Austria was available for operations in western Europe. During the winter of 1917—1918 German divisions were being hurriedly transferred by train from Russia to France and Flanders, and as a result some of the British and French divisions which had been sent to reinforce and stiffen the Italian line after the disaster of Caporetto, had been hastily recalled to the front where the real issue was to be fought out.

As early as the middle of February there were persistent rumours that the enemy was elaborating measures for an attack upon an unusually large scale, but for some time such patrols as were sent out from the 6th Division failed to detect signs of any really serious enemy reinforcement in the immediate front.

For some considerable time past the heavy and increasing drain on the man-power of the British nation had been causing the military authorities very considerable anxiety, and at last it was reluctantly determined to carry out a reorganization in the divisional composition of the British Army in France; this measure was completed during the month of February, 1918, when the number of battalions in a division was reduced from thirteen to ten, and that of battalions in a brigade from four to three. The effect of this measure, so far as concerned the 6th Division, was that three battalions—the 9th Suffolks, the 8th Bedfords and the 14th Durham Light Infantry—were taken from their brigades and incontinently disbanded.

The front held by the Division at the beginning of March was generally on a forward slope opposite the villages of Quéant and Pronville.

"No Man's Land averaged three-quarters of a mile in width. The whole area was downland, and very suitable for the action of tanks. The position lay astride a succession of well-defined broad spurs and narrow valleys (like the fingers of a partially opened hand), merging into the broad transverse valley which separated the British line from the villages above mentioned. All the advantages of ground lay with the defence, and it seemed as if no attack could succeed unless by the aid of tanks. A large portion of the front line—notably the valleys—was sown with 2-in. trench mortar bombs with instantaneous fuses, which would detonate under the pressure of a wagon but not of a man's foot. In addition five anti-tank 18-pounder guns were placed in positions of vantage. The wire was very broad and thick. The position would, indeed,

Digitized by Google

have been almost impregnable had there been sufficient time to complete it and had there been separate troops for counter-attack."*

The following was at this time the composition and distribution of the Third and Fifth Armies upon which the main attack of the Germans was to fall: the Third Army (General Byng) contained four corps—the XVIIth in the Arras—Monchy sector, the VIth between that and Bullecourt, the IVth carrying the line on to opposite Cambrai, while the Vth Corps covered a gap in the Hindenburg line whence an attack seemed specially likely to issue. The IVth Corps was commanded by General Harper, and contained the 6th and 51st Divisions, respectively on left and right. The Fifth Army (General Gough) consisted of the VIIth Corps in the southern portion of the Cambrai district, the XIXth from south of Ronssoy to Maissemy, the XVIIIth in front of St. Quentin, while the IIIrd covered the ground from Orvillers to Barisis.

The Field-Marshal has stated† that "the general principle of our defensive arrangements on the front of those armies, was the distribution of our troops in depth. With this object three defensive belts, sited at considerable distances from each other, had been constructed or were approaching completion in the forward area, the most advanced of which was in the nature of a lightly-held outpost screen covering our main positions. On the morning of the attack the troops detailed to man these various defences were all in position. . . . In all at least 64 German divisions took part in the operations of the first day of the battle, a number considerably exceeding the total forces composing the entire British Army in France. . . . To meet this assault the Third Army disposed of eight divisions in line on the front of the enemy's initial attack, with seven divisions available in reserve. The Fifth Army disposed of 14 divisions and three cavalry divisions, of which three infantry divisions and three cavalry divisions were in reserve. The total British force on the original battle front, on the morning of March 21st, was 29 infantry divisions and three cavalry divisions, of which 19 infantry divisions were in line."

The following description of the ground occupied by the 6th Division early in March is given in the "Short History": "the ground was a portion of that wrested from the enemy in the Cambrai offensive of November—December, 1917, but had only improvised trenches. A month's hard frost in January had militated against digging, and though there were a complete front trench and reserve trench, the support trenches hardly existed, and dug-outs were noticeable by their absence. The front was 4,500 yards in extent, the three brigades in line—18th on right, 71st in centre, 16th on left—on approximately equal frontages. The depth from front or outpost zone was about 2,000 yards. With only three battalions in a brigade, there was no option but to assign one battalion in each brigade to the defence of the outpost zones, and keep two battalions in depth in the battle zone. With battalions at just over half strength, and with the undulating nature of the ground, the defence resolved itself everywhere into a succession of posts with a very limited field of fire."

"On March 10th," writes Major Tylden-Wright, "we took over the line on the right of Lagnicourt, and although we thought an attack was likely to take

* *Short History of the 6th Division*, pp. 44, 45.
† Despatch of October 21st, 1918.

Digitized by Google

place we did not expect to stay in the line more than about four days, and that we should be taken out again for a rest. The attack did not materialize when expected, and we were told that we must stay there until the attack did take place, although orders were issued for a relief to take place on the night of March 22nd—23rd. It was a very trying time for all ranks waiting for the attack, and the High Command twice said good-bye and wished us luck."

There had now been several reports from deserters that an overwhelming attack was imminent, and the 6th Division twice stood to arms prior to March 21st. On the 20th aeroplane photographs disclosed ammunition pits for seventy extra batteries opposite the divisional front, and when at 5 a.m. on March 21st the bombardment commenced, there was no doubt but that a real offensive had begun. Warning had been given overnight for all troops to be in battle positions by 5 a.m., but it came too late to stop working parties, and the reserve battalions of all brigades had marched ten miles before the battle opened.

The war diary of the 2nd Battalion Sherwood Foresters for March 20th contains the words "Enemy unusually quiet," but it was a silence that had something ominous about it, being no more than the calm before the storm.

At this time Major Tylden-Wright was in command of the Battalion in the absence on leave of Lieutenant-Colonel Milward, and he tells us that "the high ground on our left was held by the 2nd York and Lancaster, and our line commenced on the far side of the small valley which contained the road from Lagnicourt to Quéant. The valley itself was held by 'C' Company, under Captain Finch, having two platoons in the front line and two in support, while 'D' Company, under Captain Beedham, was on the right, 'B,' under Captain Giles, was in the strong point behind 'D,' while 'A' Company, under command of Captain Shaw, was in the support trench, with Battalion headquarters in the sunken road. There were numerous reports of enemy tanks having been heard at Quéant, and it was decided to put out a minefield in the valley in front of 'C' Company. The minefield was laid by battalions which were resting, and we found the covering parties; these were withdrawn four men at a time, and on coming through the field one of the men kicked the top of one of the mines, which exploded, although it was not supposed to go off under about 30 cwt. pressure. The explosion killed two men, and it was a mercy it did not set the whole minefield off. Both battalions in the line and those at rest were kept busy digging trenches every night, so that the men were tired out.

"At midnight on the 20th—21st March, Lieutenant Boyd reported from 'C' Company that the Germans were wiring, and that they had the Lewis guns on them with good effect; these had to stop firing owing to one of our patrols going out, and it was soon pretty evident that the enemy were not wiring, but were cutting their wire preparatory to an attack. The German guns opened about 5 a.m. on the 21st on our gun positions and back lines, and we had orders to withdraw all patrols as our barrage was to come down at 5.45. We had great difficulty in getting our patrol in when the Germans put down a tremendous barrage on our front line."

Of this bombardment the entry in the Battalion diary runs: "Enemy's bombardment, consisting of every description of shells, including gas shells, opened out at 5 a.m. and remained on our lines until 9.30 a.m."; while the

Digitized by Google

Sixth Division History states that "for five hours the bombardment continued with tremendous force, first with gas and high explosive on back areas to cut communications and disorganize reinforcements, later about 7 to 8 a.m. with smoke and high explosive on the forward system. The intensity of it may be gauged by the fact that four out of five concealed anti-tank guns were knocked out by direct hits. This bombardment annihilated the garrisons of the forward system, and few survivors came back to the reserve line. *The only authenticated accounts of a successful resistance in the front system were from the 71st Infantry Brigade, where both 9th Norfolks and 2nd Sherwood Foresters repulsed the first attack.*"

Opinions differ as to whether the fog, which this morning lay heavy on the British front, did or did not favour the German attack—General Sir Hubert Gough is of opinion that it did *not**; but General Marden, commanding the 6th Division, considers that the fog *did* prevent his men from seeing the exact moment when the enemy attack was launched. "Every credit must be given the Germans," he says, "for the skill they evinced and the dash with which they pushed forward and brought up successive waves of attackers. By concentrating their efforts on the three main valleys, *i.e.*, Noreuil Valley on our extreme left, Lagnicourt Valley in the centre, and Morchies Valley on our extreme right, they avoided much of the fire which they would have encountered on the broad spurs, and thus worked round and isolated the garrisons of the latter."

Second-Lieutenant Gordon-Taylor tells us that "about this time there was a lifting of the barrage from the front line, and this was more so on our front than on other fronts. Gas masks had been worn hitherto, but soon after the enemy was seen moving to attack, practically in column of route, in the direction of the Norfolks' front, these were discarded, the information passed on, and several S.O.S. lights put up in the direction of the threatened attack. These, however, only gave a very weak light, and owing to existing conditions could not be seen at any distance. They produced absolutely no artillery fire in reply, and simultaneously a heavy machine gun flanking fire was put upon us by the enemy. Communication with the rear, except by runner, had gone some time. It was impossible to see more than a fraction of what was happening, although the sun was out, but it was soon evident the enemy had broken through on the right and was going through in column of route. He made great use of machine guns and for his flanking fire had three men to a gun—one having the gun strapped on his back and dropping into a shell-hole or the like with it, while the second man fired from his back."

Of the IVth Corps front generally it may be said that the northern stretch from Dernicourt to Lagnicourt, occupied by the 6th Division, was very much more seriously assailed than that to the south held by the 51st Division, and that the 71st Infantry Brigade in the Lagnicourt sector was especially hard hit, being attacked by a very strong force of the enemy† which included the 1st Prussian Guard, which at one period of the fight practically surrounded the 9th Norfolks.

"The German bombardment," writes Major Tylden-Wright, "blew our

* Sparrow, *The Fifth Army in March*, 1918, pp. 56-60.

† In *Schlacten und Gefechte des Grossen Krieges* it is stated that part of the 195th Infantry Division was engaged in the attack on Lagnicourt.

Digitized by Google

[*Photo, Imperial War Museum.*

RUE DE LILLE, ARMENTIÈRES.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

front line to pieces, and when they attacked in the mist and dust they quite overran 'C' Company in the valley by weight of numbers. The Germans got into the front line on the right and 'D' Company drove them out again, but they came on once more in overwhelming numbers, over-running 'D' Company and bumping against 'B,' which was in the strong point. 'A' Company were nearly all killed by shell fire, together with their captain, Shaw. The death of this officer was a great loss to the Battalion, as he had always shown the greatest bravery and initiative. 'B' Company and Battalion headquarters were pinned down to their positions, and the Germans remained about thirty yards from us."

In their attack the enemy had succeeded in cutting in two the company holding Skipton Reserve and in entering the trench between Harrogate and Edinburgh Avenues, but were driven out and the trench cleared by a local counter-attack; but by 11.5 the Germans were in complete possession of Bradford Avenue and had also effected an entry on the left of Skipton Reserve, but here again a counter-attack dislodged them and Skipton Reserve was held. And so attack and counter-attack succeeded each other until 2.30 p.m., Captain Thornton being conspicuous for gallant leading; and now a message was received from Brigade headquarters that Lagnicourt, on the Battalion left, was in the hands of the enemy, and that a defensive flank was to be formed facing that village. A new position was now taken up, Skipton Strong Point being the right and Headquarters of the 9th Norfolks the left, and a small garrison, reinforced by a party of the Norfolks, being left in Skipton Strong Point, while the 2nd Battalion Sherwood Foresters withdrew to a sunken road in rear of the old position; during this withdrawal many casualties occurred, Majors Tylden-Wright and Wilson and Captain Thornton being wounded, and the Battalion command now devolving upon Captain K. N. Bion, though Major Tylden-Wright did not go to the rear till evening. It had been hoped to find a battalion in support in the sunken road, but on arrival there it was discovered that it had withdrawn and that the enemy was still no more than some forty yards distant on the left. What ammunition remained was now redistributed, and while doing this Regimental Sergeant-Major S. Poston was mortally wounded.

As it got dark it was learnt that the enemy had broken through the 51st Division (on the right of the 6th) and orders were given to fall back to the Vaulx—Morchies line, where was the remainder of the Brigade; and this withdrawal was successfully and in good order accomplished by 9 p.m. From the new line listening patrols went forward and reported all quiet, and so matters remained until 5 a.m. on the 22nd, when, being relieved in the Vaulx—Morchies line by the 1st Leicesters, the Battalion retired and took up another position 1,200 yards north of Beugny, where shell-holes were occupied and a line facing north-east was formed. The strength was now only 5 officers and 130 other ranks out of 24 officers and 550 non-commissioned officers and men who were in the line when the attack commenced.

The Germans by this time were in occupation of the villages of Doignies, Boursies, Louverval and Lagnicourt, their total penetration from Boursies in the south to Ecoust in the north, a distance of seven miles, averaging about 300 yards.

Digitized by Google

The enemy renewed his attacks at 7.30 on the morning of the 22nd, and these continued for some hours, principally about Vaulx and Mericourt Woods, but the Foresters were not called upon until midday, when they moved up to within 1,500 yards of Vaulx with the view of making a counter-attack against the Vaulx—Morchies line in conjunction with the 9th Norfolks; but their numbers were considered too weak for this and the proposed attack was abandoned. Later, at 2.30 p.m., the enemy was reported as attacking in force from the direction of Vaulx, and the Battalion was moved up and occupied a line 200 yards in rear of the Vaulx—Morchies road to try to hold up the attack. An hour later, the Germans being found advancing in overwhelming numbers and our troops on the right having withdrawn, it was considered advisable to retire to the position north of Beugny which had been held in the morning. The withdrawal was effected in good order, but in the course of it the Battalion suffered a great loss in the death of Captain Bion, a most able and gallant officer, who was shot through the head by a bullet fired from a German aeroplane. The command of the Battalion was now assumed by Captain A. H. A. Giles.

This last position was held under very heavy shell and machine-gun fire until 3 a.m. on the 23rd, when the 6th Division was relieved by the 41st, and the Battalion by the 1st Royal West Kent Regiment, of the 19th Division. After relief the remainder of the 2nd Foresters—4 officers and 110 non-commissioned officers and men—marched back through Beugny, Fremicourt and Bapaume to a camp near Bihucourt where the 71st Brigade was in process of being reformed, and here the command of the Battalion was taken over by Captain C. Allerton, D.S.O., of the 9th Battalion Suffolk Regiment, who had been transferred the previous month to take up the duty of adjutant only.

The Battalion, with such details as had reached it from the base, now prepared to take up a position north-east of Bihucourt facing Sapignies and Mory, when it was reported that the enemy had again broken through the British line: but patrols sent out towards Mory established that the attack was held, and later in the day Mory was recaptured by the 41st Division, the 6th Division now concentrating in the neighbourhood of Achiet preparatory to transfer to another part of the long British front and a different army.

The casualties incurred by the Division in the forty-eight hours' fighting of March 21st—23rd amounted to some 3,900 out of a total for the Division of somewhat over 5,000 engaged, and out of a total trench strength of less than 5,000 infantry; and on the morning of the 23rd the survivors of the 71st Infantry Brigade numbered no more than 11 officers and 279 other ranks out of a trench strength on the morning of the 21st of just over 1,800 all ranks!

The losses in the 2nd Battalion of our Regiment during those two days of hard and constant fighting, following upon many days of fatigue and strain, amounted to: killed, 3 officers and 35 non-commissioned officers and men; wounded, 4 officers and 77 other ranks; while 12 officers and 302 other ranks were missing.

The names of the officers are: killed, Captains M. M. Shaw, M.C. and K. N. Bion, M.C., and Lieutenant W. Burns*; wounded, Major H. Tylden-Wright, Lieutenant S. Cooper, and Second-Lieutenant W. A. Boyd;

* Attached from the Staffordshire Yeomanry.

Digitized by Google

and missing, Major W. Wilson, Captains H. L. Finch, N. H. Beedham and P. Thornton, Lieutenant E. C. Cousins, Second-Lieutenants H. G. Taylor, G. S. W. Profit, E. Boothroyd, F. Hemstock, H. Stirland, R. W. Paterson and G. C. Mitchell.

The magnificent fighting qualities of the 2nd Battalion were not unappreciated, for later on, when the Divisional General had time to read over all the reports which reached him from his brigadiers, he addressed the following to Brigadier-General P. W. Brown, D.S.O., commanding 71st Infantry Brigade :—

" I have read with the greatest interest your report on the operations of the 71st Infantry Brigade on 21st and 22nd March.

" Please convey to 1st Leicestershire Regiment, 2nd Sherwood Foresters and 9th Norfolk Regiment, and 71st T.M. Battery, my admiration of the splendid fight they made against overwhelming forces of the enemy.

" While deeply deploring the losses, all ranks must feel that their sacrifices have not been in vain, as they stemmed the German advance for 48 hours. The courage and tenacity of the Leicesters, Sherwood Foresters and Norfolks have added undying fame to the records of the fine Regiments of which they form a part."

In promulgating this tribute to the units of his Brigade, the Brigadier wrote :—

" It gives me the greatest pleasure to forward you the attached communication which I have received from the G.O.C. 6th Division.

" Will you please have the Major-General's letter, containing such high terms of praise, read to the men under your command on parade and also published in orders. I should also like you to tell them that, should the occasion again arise in the near future, I feel sure they will behave with the same gallantry and stoutness of heart as on the 21st and 22nd March, and that those who have lately joined the Brigade will worthily uphold the fine fighting traditions of their battalions."

Then when the 6th Division left the Third Army, General Sir J. Byng sent the following eulogistic letter of farewell to Major-General Marden.

" I cannot allow the 6th Division to leave the Third Army without expressing my appreciation of their splendid conduct during the first stages of the great battle now in progress.

" By their devotion and courage they have broken up overwhelming attacks and prevented the enemy gaining his object, namely, a decisive victory.

" I wish them every possible good luck."

The crisis had been great and it was not yet by any means surmounted, for on March 23rd Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig published the following Order of the Day to " all ranks of the British Army in France and Flanders " :—

" We are again at a crisis in the war. The enemy has collected on this front every available division, and is aiming at the destruction of the British Army. We have already inflicted on the enemy in the course of the last two days very heavy loss, and the French are sending troops as quickly as possible to our support. I feel that everyone in the Army, fully realizing how much depends on the exertions and steadfastness of each one of us, will do his utmost to prevent the enemy from attaining his object."

Digitized by Google

That the anxiety induced by the sudden and overpowering onset of the enemy was felt by others than the Commander-in-Chief of the British forces, and that the King and the Cabinet were following closely the progress of events on the western front, are evidenced by the following letters addressed respectively by His Majesty and by the Prime Minister to the Field-Marshal :—

" I can assure you that the fortitude, courage and self-sacrifice with which the troops under your command are so heroically resisting greatly superior numbers is realized by Me and My people. The Empire stands calm and confident in its soldiers. May God bless and give them strength in their time of trial."

" The British Cabinet wishes to express to the Army the thanks of the nation for its splendid defence. The whole Empire is thrilled with pride as it watches the heroic resistance offered by its brave troops to overwhelming odds. Knowing their steadfastness and courage whenever the honour of the country depends on their valour, the Empire awaits with confidence the result of this struggle to defeat the enemy's last desperate efforts to trample down the free nations of the world. At home we are prepared to do all in our power to help in the true spirit of comradeship. The men necessary to replace all casualties and the guns and machine guns required to make good those lost are either now in France or already on their way, and still further reinforcements of men and guns are ready to be thrown into the battle."

Both these messages are dated March 23rd.

The Battalion was in camp near Bihucourt when, on the early morning of the 24th, orders were received to entrain the same day for the north, joining the Second Army (General Plumer) in its old haunts in the Ypres Salient; and accordingly the Foresters marched that morning to the railway station at Puisieux-au-Mont and entrained for Doullens, which was reached at 4 a.m. on the 25th. Here the men rested until the afternoon in the Citadel and then entrained for Proven, where they arrived on the morning of the 26th, marching at once to Dragon Camp; here Lieutenant-Colonel Milward, D.S.O., assumed command of the Battalion on arrival from England. The movement to the north was, however, not yet quite completed, for next morning the Foresters proceeded by march route to billets just short of Steenvoorde, where the companies were accommodated in farms, and all settled down to rest, refit, reorganize and clean up. Here two drafts to the number of 242 non-commissioned officers and men were received and distributed among the service companies.

The recent fighting, and the very substantial advance made by the enemy, had not prevented His Majesty the King from paying a visit to his troops which had been for some time in contemplation, and on the 28th the King inspected representatives of the 6th Division and spoke to many of the survivors of the recent desperate fighting. It is stated that the King spoke, among others, to one of the Foresters who had served from the early days of the war, and remarked that he must in his time have seen some very hard fighting: " Yes, sir," replied the man in tones that carried conviction, " but this last was the bloody limit ! !"

From the difficulty which His Majesty seemed to experience in keeping his

Digitized by Google

countenance as he moved on, it did not appear as though he considered the speaker had in any way over-stated the case!

In connection with the Royal visit the Major-General commanding the 6th Division issued, on March 28th, the following Special Order of the Day:—

"*His Majesty the King this afternoon paid a visit to the 6th Division and talked to officers and men who had taken part in the recent fighting. On departure the King asked the Divisional Commander to let the Division know how much he appreciated their magnificent defence on the 21st and 22nd instant. He wished them all luck and was sure that he could depend on them to fight as well again.*

"*The Divisional Commander is sure that all ranks will proudly remember the honour done them by this special visit of His Majesty, and is confident that they will uphold in future actions the splendid reputation for fighting which they have won throughout the war, and added to in the recent battles of Cambrai and Bapaume.*"

Then when on April 3rd His Majesty's visit to his Armies in France and Flanders came to an end and he returned to England, he addressed the following letter to Sir Douglas Haig:—

"*My dear Field-Marshal,*

"*My short visit to the battle front gave me an exceptional opportunity of seeing you and some of your Generals engaged in the fierce battle still raging, and I thus obtained personal testimony to the indomitable courage and unflinching tenacity with which my splendid troops have withstood the supreme effort of the greater part of the enemy's fighting power.*

"*I was also fortunate enough to see some units recently withdrawn from the front line, and listened with wonder as officers and men narrated the thrilling incidents of a week's stubborn fighting.*

"*I was present at the entraining of fresh troops to reinforce their comrades.*

"*In a large casualty clearing station I realized what can be accomplished by good organization in promptly dealing with every variety of casualty of greater or less severity, and passing on by trains to the base hospitals those fit to travel.*

"*The patient cheerfulness of the wounded was only equalled by the care and gentleness of those ministering to their wants.*

"*With these experiences, short but vivid, I feel that the whole Empire will join with me in expressing the gratitude due to you and your Army for the skilful, unswerving manner in which this formidable attack has been, and continues to be, dealt with.*

"*Though for the moment our troops have been obliged by sheer weight of numbers to give some ground, the impression left on my mind is that no army could be in better heart, braver or more confident than that which you have the honour to command.*

"*Anyone privileged to share these experiences would feel, with me, proud of the British race and of that unconquerable spirit, which will, please God, bring us through our present trials.*

"*We at home must ensure that the man-power is adequately maintained, and that our workers—men and women—will continue nobly to meet the demands for all the necessities of war. Thus may you be relieved from any anxiety as to*

Digitized by Google

the means by which, with the support of our faithful and brave allies, your heroic Army shall justify the inspiring determination which I found permeated all ranks.

" Believe me, very sincerely yours,

(Sd.) " GEORGE, R.I."

The Battle of the Somme of this year, in the opening scenes of which our 2nd Battalion had played so noble a part, came to an end on April 5th, but, while the German advance against the southern portion of the long Allied line had been stayed, the danger was by no means over, and the British armies especially had to be ready against possible attack on another sector. As pointed out by the Field-Marshal in his despatch of July 20th, 1918, the heavy and prolonged struggle on the Somme had placed a severe strain on the forces under his command, had absorbed the whole of his reserves, and had forced him to withdraw ten divisions from the northern portions of his line, replacing these by divisions such as the 6th, exhausted in the Somme fighting. In a normal year this temporary weakening of the Flanders front would have been of no material importance, since the usual condition of the ground in an ordinary spring season might have been relied on to make offensive operations by the enemy impossible on any large scale before the month of May at the earliest. But the spring of 1918 had been exceptionally rainless, the ground in the north was rapidly drying up, and there was every indication of an early German attack in this sector.

Here the general situation " was that the front was held by tired and decimated divisions withdrawn from the big battle in the south. These had been brought up to a respectable strength by drafts from all sources—wounded men belonging to other formations, R.A.S.C., Labour battalions, etc., many of whom had received no training in infantry weapons or methods of fighting. Officers and men were new to each other"—the 2nd Battalion Sherwood Foresters, for example, received drafts amounting to 557 non-commissioned officers and men and *one* officer, Second-Lieutenant C. E. Saunders, between March 23rd and April 11th—" and there was no chance to train since the whole of every division was in the trenches.

" Against these forces the Germans now opened a determined offensive from Zandvoorde southwards."*

* *Short History of the 6th Division*, p. 53.

Digitized by Google

Maps 3 and 4

CHAPTER VII.

1918.

THE CLOSING BATTLES AND THE END OF THE WAR.

Battle Honours:

"Lys"—"Bailleul"—"Kemmel"—"Scherpenberg"—"Hindenburg Line" "Épéhy"—"St. Quentin Canal"—"Beaurevoir"—"Cambrai, 1918"—"Selle."

THE German attack upon the British divisions in Flanders commenced on the morning of April 9th, though a heavy bombardment with gas shells had opened some thirty-six hours previously along practically the whole front from Lens to Armentières, and by the evening of the 11th the enemy had forced back our line in the north until it ran from Givenchy to Locon, west of Merville, west of Neuf Berquin, north of Steenwerck and Nieppe, east of Neuve Eglise and Wulverghem, west of Messines and along the ridge just covering Wytschaete. Up to this the enemy had attacked with no more than sixteen divisions the thirteen decimated British divisions deployed on the Flanders front, but now the unexpected measure of success which he had reaped decided the German commander upon turning what he had commenced as a secondary into his main operation, and, resolving upon the capture of the Channel Ports, he threw in division after division until by April 13th some eight and twenty were engaged in the battle. Against these, reinforcements—mainly composed of Australian troops—were indeed arriving, but they could only come gradually into line, and the situation was very critical and menacing.

One day later, on April 14th, General Foch was nominated to the supreme command of all the Allied armies.

"On the afternoon of the 12th April," writes the Field-Marshal in his despatch of July 28th, 1918, "sharp fighting had taken place in the neighbourhood of Neuve Eglise, and during the night the enemy's pressure in this sector had been maintained and extended. By the morning of the 13th his troops had forced their way into the village, but before noon were driven out by troops of the 33rd and 49th Divisions by a most successful counter-attack. . . . In the evening further attacks developed . . . at Neuve Eglise"; and it was as a result of these German successes that on the 13th the 71st Infantry Brigade, which at the moment was in Divisional Reserve, was rushed up to join the 49th Division (General Cameron) on the Neuve Eglise front.

The orders to move were received by the Battalion at 2 p.m., and an hour later it had "embussed" at Ypres Asylum and was on its way to Dranoutre, which was reached at 5.30, receiving instructions three-quarters of an hour later to take up an outpost line on the slopes of Kemmel Hill. These were almost

Digitized by Google

immediately cancelled, and the 2nd Foresters had now to take up a line in support of the 148th Brigade—"A" and "B" Companies in front, "C" in close support and "D" in reserve, Battalion headquarters occupying Donegal Farm.

The account of the next few days is given in the Battalion diary as follows:

"14th. Enemy attacked 148th Brigade and he was reported to have broken through at 10.30 a.m. and men were seen retiring on our right flank, but there was no sign of any enemy advance. A message was received at 10.50 that the G.O.C. Division had given orders that the Brigade was to hold its ground at all costs. At 2.45 p.m. it was reported that the enemy had captured Neuve Eglise, and, it being reported at 7.30 p.m. that the enemy was advancing on the right, two platoons of 'C' Company were sent up to 'A.'

"The situation was not clear up to 9 p.m., and at 11 o'clock orders were received that the 148th Brigade was to withdraw through the 71st and take up a position in reserve. The Battalion was now holding front line trenches.

"15th. The Battalion headquarters moved from Donegal Farm to Bevor Hall. Situation during the morning quiet. At 2 p.m. the enemy heavily shelled our front line and at 2.45 attacked the 9th Norfolks on our right and broke through, but a counter-attack by the Norfolks drove the enemy back. The garrison of the line now left was not strong enough to hold back the enemy, so a fresh line was taken up a short distance in rear. The situation remained quiet up to midnight.

"16th. At 12.30 a.m. orders were received for the Battalion to withdraw through the 148th Brigade to the area on the Kemmel Hill slopes and into Divisional Reserve. This withdrawal was completed by 5 a.m., and orders were then received to proceed to an assembly area near Croix-Poperinghe. The enemy attacked in front of Dranoutre and was reported to be in the village, but, on patrols being sent out, it was found to be still in our hands. On this day 7 men were wounded.

"17th. Enemy heavily shelled front line trenches with gas shells, and 'C' Company was sent to support 'D.' Dranoutre was also shelled, and the enemy was said at 11 a.m. to be attacking our left; he was repulsed. The enemy bombardment became heavy again at 2 p.m. and he attacked our right, but was driven back. Seven companies of French infantry passed through the Battalion on the afternoon on their way to support the line at Kemmel, and some of the French troops were digging trenches on our front. Remainder of the day was quiet. Battalion headquarters at Locrehof Farm. Casualties this day, 3 men killed, Second-Lieutenants L. P. Morris, J. H. Temple, C. F. Saunders and R. R. Nicholson and 32 other ranks wounded.

"18th. Enemy heavily shelled back areas, but very little shelling on our front lines. Battalion took over front line at 4.30 a.m. 19th. Heavy shelling but no attack. Battalion relieved in trenches by 9th Company, 83rd Regiment of French Infantry, the relief being completed by 12.15 a.m. on the 20th, when the Battalion proceeded to Dragon Camp," which was reached at 5 in the afternoon.

The casualties under these two days' shelling had been tolerably severe, amounting to 7 non-commissioned officers and men killed and 43 wounded,

Digitized by Google

[*Photo, Imperial War Museum*

KEMMEL HILL

WHICH CHANGED HANDS TWICE IN MARCH, 1918; AS IT APPEARED FROM KEMMEL CROSS ROADS, MARCH 26TH, 1919.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

while between April 13th and 20th the total Battalion casualties were 14 men killed, 5 officers and 88 other ranks wounded and 22 men missing. The other officer wounded was Second-Lieutenant C. S. Perry.

The 71st Brigade was now back again with its own Division, through which the following congratulatory and flattering messages were received:—

"The Divisional Commander has very great pleasure in communicating the following wire which he has received from the G.O.C. 49th Division:— 'Wish to record my very warm appreciation of the services of the 71st Infantry Brigade whilst under my command. All ranks did splendidly.'

"The Divisional Commander congratulates you and all ranks of your Brigade on the conduct which has earned this appreciation from the Divisional Commander under whom you were at the time serving."

In forwarding these to the battalions of the 71st Brigade their commander wrote:—

"The Brigadier-General Commanding has great pleasure in communicating the above letter received from Headquarters 6th Division, and feels sure all ranks will appreciate the high terms of praise regarding the Brigade from the G.O.C. 49th Division. In addition he wishes to thank one and all for their untiring devotion to duty and steadiness under very trying conditions during the week the Brigade was detached from the 6th Division, and he is certain that whatever the future may have in store for us the same high reputation of the 71st Infantry Brigade will be maintained."

Between April 19th and 23rd several young officers and 33 other ranks joined, the officers being Lieutenants T. W. C. Irwin and F. H. E. Abbott, Second-Lieutenants J. L. Tombazis, W. J. Threlfall, A. Kent, H. Albutt, L. Cashmore, J. H. Redgate and J. S. Corless.

The rest of the month of April is described in the diary as "quiet," but this may be taken as a relative term, since there were some 25 more casualties before the month closed, 7 men being killed and 18, including Second-Lieutenant H. Eyre, being wounded, while the reinforcements totalled 12 only.

After the withdrawal of the 71st Brigade the Germans attacked and captured Kemmel Hill and village, and the result of this enemy success, as stated by the British Commander-in-Chief, "seriously threatened our position in the Ypres Salient, the communications and southern defences of which were now under direct observation by the enemy; while his continued progress to the north-west in the Voormezeele sector would make the extrication of troops east of Ypres most hazardous. A further readjustment of our lines in the Salient was accordingly carried out on the night of the 26th—27th April, our troops withdrawing to the general line Pilckem—Wieltje—west end of Zillebeke Lake—Voormezeele. . . . The month closed with the enemy definitely held on both the southern and the northern battle fronts. . . .

"In the six weeks of almost constant fighting, from the 21st March to the 30th April, a total of 55 British infantry divisions and 3 cavalry divisions was employed on the battle fronts against a force of 109 different German divisions. During this period a total of 141 different German divisions were engaged against the combined British and French forces."

The artillery on both sides continued very active during the first ten days

Digitized by Google

or so of May, and when on the 8th the Germans made an unsuccessful attack in the area about Dickebusch Lake, the 6th Division, which was on the edge of the battle, stood to in expectation of an attack on its own front, which did not, however, materialize. Then on the 11th the Division commenced a move to the south in relief of the 19th Division, thus coming next in line to the 14th French Division and passing to the IInd Corps, commanded by Lieutenant-General Sir C. Jacob. The Battalion did not move until the 12th, when it marched across country, and on arrival at its destination took over the right sub-section of the Château Segard sector. Here the enemy's snipers were almost at once found to be active, Second-Lieutenant A. Nicholson and one man being killed and 7 men wounded on the early morning of the day following arrival.

During the greater part of the month the ordinary trench routine was pursued, enlivened by the activities of patrols such as that led by Second-Lieutenant R. R. Nicholson on the 23rd, when, making for the German lines, he found a post occupied: this was rushed, three of the enemy were shot and the remainder pursued until the resistance became too strong to be ignored. The patrol then fell back, and looking again into the enemy's post *en route*, found it had, unwisely, been reoccupied. It was again rushed and two of the garrison brought in prisoners, the patrol having only one man wounded. Towards the end of the month there was some German activity displayed against the French on the right, but with assistance from certain units of the Division this was overcome.

During the three weeks that the Division remained in these parts, one brigade was always at Dirty Bucket Camp working on rear lines of defence, one was training in the St. Jan ter Biezen area, and the third was at musketry practice at Cormette, near Tilques. On June 2nd three officers and 6 non-commissioned officers of the United States Army were attached to the Battalion for instruction. Then on the 3rd a raid on the enemy's lines was carried out by Second-Lieutenants R. R. Nicholson and P. H. Adams and 20 other ranks, with instructions to "find an enemy post, rush it, kill and capture any enemy." The post *was* found right enough, a long trench with machine guns at either end and a large garrison; but in his report Colonel Milward complains somewhat bitterly that the hopes of his raiding party were blighted by the unseemly noises made by a similar raiding party engaged on his left, whereby the attention of the occupants of the German trench was aroused and the well-meant efforts of the Foresters came to naught.

In the last week of June the 6th Division was transferred to the XIXth Corps, commanded by Lieutenant-General Sir H. E. Watts, and relieved the 46th French Division (Chasseurs) in the Dickebusch sector. "This was on a very unpleasant front, where the dominating position of the enemy on Kemmel Hill made movement, even in the rear lines, impossible by day, and practically all work, of which there was plenty, had to be done by night."*

In accordance with the above arrangements the Battalion proceeded on June 25th to Gabb Chase in the Rozendael area by march route to St. Omer and thence by train to Proven, marching again from here to camp, which was

* *Short History of the 6th Division*, p. 56.

Digitized by Google

reached the same afternoon; on the 28th the Battalion took the place of the 62nd Battalion of the Chasseurs Alpins in the reserve area.

During the month of July portions of the 6th Division successfully attacked the enemy, recapturing Ridgewood and Elzenwalle and taking several guns and many prisoners, but the 71st Brigade was not engaged in these operations. All the same the Battalion kept the enemy in its front on the alert by carrying out several small raids. One of these was undertaken by a party of fifty Foresters, under Captain Abbott and Second-Lieutenant Kent, in broad daylight on July 9th, when a German post was rushed, all the garrison were killed or wounded, and a German machine gun was captured, Captain Abbott being unfortunately killed in bringing it in; the other officer with the party was wounded, as were two men, while two others were killed.

On the 14th Lieutenant O. M. Simpson, who had only joined two days previously, was killed; and on the night of the 23rd "D" Company organized another small raid, under Second-Lieutenant Tombazis with ten men; a German post was rushed and the occupants incontinently bolted so that no prisoners could be captured, and machine-gun fire having been opened on the party from a neighbouring post, the Foresters retired with their officer and four men slightly wounded.

During the month of August the Division had the experience of closer association with the troops of the United States Army, part of the 27th, or New York Division, being attached for instruction in trench warfare, and the Sherwood Foresters had the pleasure of mothering the 2nd Battalion 105th Regiment of the American Army. On the 21st the Americans relieved the 6th Division in the line, and this was then withdrawn for rest and training to the Wizernes area, the Battalion marching by road to the railway station at Rémy, and thence by train and road to Tatingham, near St. Omer; the Battalion transport moved by the following route, viz., Winnezeele—Hardifort—Wenaers—Cappel—Zuytepeene and Clairmarais. Arrived at Tatingham, training was pursued with particular intensity—musketry on the Cormette rifle range, practice in digging, in advancing behind a barrage, and in the attack on strong points, etc.

On leaving the XIXth Corps the Corps Commander sent the Division his "warmest thanks for and appreciation of the excellent service rendered" whilst under his command.

"Originally destined," to quote the 6th Division History, "to take part in a projected attack for the recapture of Kemmel Hill and village, the Division suddenly received orders at the end of August, to the delight of all, to move southwards at very short notice. During September 1st, 2nd and 3rd the move southwards was carried out by rail, the Division, less artillery, detraining at Corbie, Heilly and Méricourt. On the 4th the Divisional artillery followed, and the whole Division was concentrated in the area Heilly—Ribemont—Franvillers, on the River Ancre, in G.H.Q. Reserve. The next few days were devoted to a continuation of the training in open warfare commenced in the Wizernes area.

"The Germans, forced back in July and August from the high-water mark of the advance in March and April, had stood on the line of the Somme and

Digitized by Google

the Peronne—Arras road. In the southern sector of the British front the Somme defences had been turned by the brilliant capture of the Mont St. Quentin (to the north of and guarding Péronne) by the Australian Corps. The retreating enemy had been pursued across the Somme by the 32nd Division, which had been attached temporarily to the Australians. This division now became part of the newly-constituted IXth Corps (Lieutenant-General Sir W. Braithwaite)" in the Fourth Army, under General Rawlinson. The IXth Corps contained the 1st, 6th, 32nd and 46th Divisions, and was on the extreme right of the British Army.

Of this period of the war the Field-Marshal wrote as follows in his despatch of December 21st, 1918: "The 1st September marks the close of the second stage in the British offensive. Having in the first stage freed Amiens by our brilliant success east of that town, in the second stage the troops of the Third and Fourth Armies, comprising 23 British divisions, by skilful leading, hard fighting, and relentless and unremitting pursuit, in ten days had driven 35 German divisions from one side of the old Somme battlefield to the other, thereby turning the line of the River Somme. In so doing they had inflicted upon the enemy the heaviest losses in killed and wounded, and had taken from him over 35,000 prisoners and 270 guns. . . . In the obstinate fighting of the past few days the enemy had been pressed back to the line of the Somme River and the high ground about Rocquigny and Beugny, where he had shown an intention to stand for a time. Thereafter his probable plan was to retire slowly, when forced to do so, from one intermediary position to another, until he could shelter his battered divisions behind the Hindenburg defences. . . . A sudden and successful blow, of weight sufficient to break through the northern hinge of the defences to which it was his design to fall back, might produce results of great importance. At this date . . . our troops were already in position to deliver such a stroke."

On the night of September 13th—14th the 6th Division relieved the 32nd near Holnon Wood, three and a half miles west of St. Quentin, having the 1st Division on the left and the 34th French Division on the right. It was expected that the enemy would stand on the heights which command St. Quentin to the west and south, but it was not known whether his resistance would be strong or not, as his troops were much disorganized and his *morale* had declined. The 1st and 2nd Divisions, hand in hand with the French, were ordered to capture this tactical line on September 18th, as a starting point for the attack on the Hindenburg Line, which ran just outside St. Quentin to the canal at Bellenglise.

The Battalion left St. Omer on September 2nd, and, proceeding by train and march route via Corbie, La Houssoye, Bussy and Aubigny, reached Monchy-la-Gache on the night of the 14th. The next two days were spent mainly in continuation of the training which recently had been in progress, and then, on the night of September 17th, the following orders were received:—

"The 6th British Division, in conjunction with the 1st British Division on the left and the 34th French Division on the right, will attack on the morning of 18th September to gain the Green and Red objectives shown on attached map. To make good the jumping-off line for this attack, the 18th Infantry

Digitized by Google

Brigade and the 34th French Division are attacking on the morning of the 17th to secure the general line—high ground in M.25.d. and S.3.a. Round Hill—Bois de Savy. For the attack on the 18th the 71st British Infantry Brigade will be on the right, the 16th on the left, and the 18th in support behind the 71st. . . .

"The 71st Infantry Brigade will attack with the 2nd Sherwood Foresters and the 9th Norfolk Regiment; the 1st Leicestershire Regiment will be in reserve. The 2nd Sherwood Foresters will take the Green line, the 9th Norfolks the Red line. Both objectives will be consolidated in depth. Half a battalion of the 1st West Yorks is moving forward one hour before zero to a position in Trout Copse, and one company is at the call of the 2nd Sherwood Foresters to fill a gap between their right and the French left. . . . The French regiment on our right is the 59th. . . .

"The Battalion will commence the attack on a 850 yards front, and on reaching its objective will be occupying a front of 1,600 yards. It will form up at the position of deployment on a three-company front with one company in support. Each front line company will attack on a two-platoon front with two platoons in support in assault formations, 100 yards between waves. . . . 'A' and 'B' Companies will occupy Etretat trench, Epicure Alley and a trench running just west of Sehency Château to the Brigade boundary. 'C' Company will occupy Douai trench with battle outposts thrown out as far as the Green line. . . . Two tanks are working with the Brigade; they will not be used forward of the Green line."

Unfortunately the operations of the 17th, which were to have "made good the jumping-off line" for the next day's attack, were only partially successful, the French assault failing, while Holnon village, through which the line was to have passed, was only in part cleared of the enemy. "The situation then," as stated in the Divisional History, "was therefore unsatisfactory on the right, but it was impossible to put off the general attack, and arrangements had to be improvised. Another unsatisfactory feature was that Holnon Wood covered practically the whole 2,500 yards frontage of the Division, and was so drenched with gas shells and the tracks so bad, that both the 16th and 71st Infantry Brigades had to make a detour north and south of the wood respectively to reach their assembly positions, and this naturally fatigued the troops and hindered communication and supply.

"Standing on the east edge of the wood, a bare glacis-slope devoid of cover except for two or three shell-trap copses, stretched away for 3,000 yards to the high ground overlooking St. Quentin. There was no sign of life and very few trenches could be seen, though it was known that they were there, as the Fifth Army had held the position in March, 1918. It was found afterwards that the Germans had camouflaged their trenches with thistles, which had covered the ground to a height in many places of eighteen inches.

"At the highest point, about the centre of the divisional area of attack, was a network of trenches known later as the Quadrilateral—a name of bad omen to the 6th Division—and which, like its namesake on the Somme, could be reinforced under cover from the back slopes of the hill. An examination of the battlefield after the 24th September also revealed several narrow sunken

Digitized by Google

roads filled with wire. The position was one of great natural strength, and in addition the whole of the right was dominated by heights in the area to be attacked by the French. Lastly, adequate time could not be given to brigades for reconnaissance owing to the imperative necessity of pushing on to guard the flank of the corps further north. The troops had not seen the ground they had to attack over, and rain and smoke obscured the few landmarks existing on the 18th September.

"On that morning the Division attacked at 5.20 a.m. with the 71st Infantry Brigade on the right, its left directed on the Quadrilateral and its right on Holnon and Selency. The 16th Infantry Brigade was on the left, with its right just clear of the Quadrilateral and its left on Fresnoy-le-Petit. Six tanks were allotted to the Division, but met with various mishaps or were knocked out, and were not of much use. The attack met with most determined opposition at once, especially on the right, where the difficulties of the 71st Brigade were increased by the failure of the French to take Round and Manchester Hills."

So much for the general story of the events leading up to and the preliminaries of the action, and this must now be filled in by the account drawn from Battalion sources.

The 2nd Sherwood Foresters moved up to the position of readiness on the afternoon of the 17th, and were in the assembly position by 3.15 next morning, advancing to attack at 5.25. Some 40 German prisoners were almost at once captured, but it very soon became evident that the enemy was in great strength, that his machine guns were very numerous and well disposed, and that his wire was unusually thick and but little damaged by our artillery. At 7.45 the right company of the Battalion was reported held up by heavy machine-gun fire, but the remaining companies pushed on, and soon after 8 a.m. the right company, with the 1st Buffs and 2nd Durham Light Infantry of the 16th Brigade, was reported as holding Douai trench with its left in touch with the 2nd York and Lancaster Regiment. There was now a long pause in the battle.

Between 10 and 12 o'clock p.m. news came to hand that the attack by the French had broken down, and that British attacks upon Holnon village had failed owing to the heavy fire from the German machine guns. Orders from the Brigade about midday on the 18th directed the attack upon the Quadrilateral to be renewed by the Foresters and the 9th Norfolks; but these orders were cancelled during the night of the 18th—19th, no doubt owing to the weakness of these battalions by reason of the losses they had sustained, and these were now ordered to withdraw to a position in rear between the Badger and Kirchner Copses, while other battalions took their place; these new units were, however, no more successful, and at 10 p.m. on the 19th the Battalion was directed to retire still further, with the Battalion headquarters in a quarry.

By 3.5 a.m. on the 20th the Battalion was in its new position, and it was now possible to form some approximate estimate of the losses it had incurred, when it was found that these were not far short of 400 killed, wounded and missing: there were killed, 4 officers—Captain H. H. Tyler, M.C., Second-Lieutenants J. S. Corless, R. R. Nicholson, M.C., W. Meek—and 56 other ranks; wounded, 6 officers—Lieutenant R. D. Trevor-Roper, Second-Lieutenants A. Lawler, C. B. Keatley, W. J. Threlfall, J. Lyth, J. H. Redgate

Digitized by Google

—and 267 non-commissioned officers and men, while 3 officers—Second-Lieutenants A. Millin, J. Cowe and T. P. Plant—and 37 men were missing.

The situation was still critical and the Brigade had suffered heavily, but the Battalion—now organized, owing to its weakness, in two companies—again moved up and took over a portion of the Brigade front—one company in the outpost line and one in support, and these were in position by 4 a.m. on the 21st. This evening another young officer lost his life, Second-Lieutenant H. V. Bright being killed by the explosion of a dump of 4.5 ammunition outside Battalion headquarters. Then at last, very early on the morning of the 24th, the Battalion withdrew by companies to a new position in Jean Deveaux Woods, and spent the whole of the 25th in re-equipping and reorganizing, and in distributing among the companies the men of a draft of 98 other ranks which had now arrived.

The work so well begun and so gallantly carried out by the 71st Brigade was completed by the 16th and 18th Brigades, which devoted the whole of September 25th to the clearing of the Quadrilateral, and by midnight of this day the position was finally captured—"one of such unusual natural strength that captured German officers admitted they had fully expected to be able to hold it indefinitely. For this very fine performance the 6th Division received the congratulations of the Army and Corps Commanders. The village of Selency had also fallen, while on the right the French had attacked and captured Manchester Hill."

On September 20th Lieutenant-Colonel Milward, D.S.O., was appointed to the command of the IXth Corps Schools, and left the Battalion, handing over command to Lieutenant-Colonel C. E. Hudson, V.C., D.S.O., M.C., who had lately been commanding our 11th Service Battalion in the Italian theatre of war.

For the first three days of October the Battalion was in billets near Tertry, but on the 4th it moved up to a new area near Magnay-la-Fosse, crossing the canal and the old Hindenburg Line and going again into bivouac; but on the 6th it relieved the Buffs in the support and front line. The Foresters were now again organized in four companies, and "A" and "B" were in front, "C" and "D" being disposed in depth in rear in whatever cover they could find. The next day, the 7th, was quiet, and was passed in reconnoitring the ground in front and in arranging details for the attack to be launched on the morrow as part of the great battle which had commenced again on September 29th, and which was destined finally to break the back of the whole German resistance.

During the few days while the 6th Division had been engaged in reorganizing and absorbing such reinforcements as had come in, the other divisions composing the IXth Corps had broken the Hindenburg Line, and, pushing on in pursuit of the retreating enemy, had experienced very severe fighting and now needed rest in their turn. These the 6th Division was ordered to relieve, and to attack on October 8th in the direction of Bohain. "The 30th American Division was on the right and about 2,000 yards ahead, connected to the 6th Division by a series of posts along the railway. This curious position entailed a very complicated creeping barrage, which, however, was successfully put in operation on the day of the attack. On the right was the French 42nd Division slightly in rear, having followed the Germans through St. Quentin

Digitized by Google

and met with strong resistance beyond it. The position to be attacked consisted of high rolling downs with deep transverse valleys, giving good cover for supports and forward guns, and on the right a broad longitudinal valley closed by a ridge on which stood the village of Méricourt. . . . The Divisional Commander decided to leave the valley severely alone to start with, merely smoking by guns and bombs from aeroplanes the Méricourt Ridge and attacking all along the high ground on the north."*

The 16th Infantry Brigade was on the right next to the valley, while the 71st was on the left next to the Americans.

The following is the account, drawn up by Lieutenant-Colonel Hudson, of the part taken in the fighting of the next four days by our 2nd Battalion.

"On the evening of the 6th October the Battalion marched up and took over the line; this line ran roughly along the Ramicourt—Sequehart sunken road and track in the forward slope of Hill 156 due south of Ramicourt. The ground in front was open grass land, undulating, but bare except for small copses and a number of sunken roads. The enemy had been heavily attacked daily for the last few days, and it was hoped to get him on the run.

"An attack was therefore to be made at dawn on the 7th with the Norfolk Regiment on the left, ourselves on the right of the Brigade front, and the Leicestershire Regiment in support. Other troops were to attack north and south of us. The Battalion objective for this attack was between, but exclusive of, Champignons Copse and Doon Mill, over Doon Hill and down into the sunken road from Brancourt to Fresnoy le Grand. Our frontage on the road widened out to about 900 yards from 650 at the start.

"No Man's Land admitted of our assembling in the dark in front of our present line on tapes laid out that night, covered by outposts. The assembly was carried out successfully, 'B' and 'D' Companies leading, 'A' and 'C' Companies in support. Platoons were told off to cover the advance from fire from Doon Hill and Champignons Copses when these points were reached, but the battalions on the right and left were actually responsible for their capture. If strongly held, however, it was obvious that the Battalion could hardly hope to pass through the narrow neck between the two copses until one, at any rate, was taken. The Battalion orders were to push through the gap as soon as possible and to attack Doon Hill, the capture of which would do more than frontal attack on the copses right and left, to dislodge the enemy from their forward position.

"The advance at dawn was covered by a powerful artillery barrage. The enemy reply was heavy, and little counter battery work was possible against it owing to lack of knowledge of the enemy position, which had been withdrawn some distance. The enemy method was to fire with all guns for about the first half hour, then, if the attack was not held up, all guns bar one per battery would retire. The single gun would continue firing as rapidly as possible, using up the battery ammunition dump. The crew would then destroy the gun and retire. On this day this practice did not seem to be in vogue across the whole front as it was later on, as we found to our cost.

* *A Short History of the 6th Division*, p. 65.

Digitized by Google

"The enemy outpost line facing us was thinly held and offered little resistance. Our men followed the barrage closely and captured the outpost line defenders who survived the barrage. Mannequin Hill, on our right, gave trouble to the troops on the right, and we suffered from enfilade fire from this position in consequence. The companies, however, had crossed the danger zone from this point before fire was opened out, and had gained cover of a projecting shoulder of hill.

"Battalion headquarters, which followed in rear of the companies, did not escape so cheaply, and lost a number of men and the acting adjutant, Lieutenant Irwin, who later died of the effects of his wounds, in England.

"By this time the companies had taken about 60 to 80 prisoners in the quarry and sunken road from Neuilles Cross at the foot of the long rise up to Doon Mill Copse. Companies were quickly reorganized after the fight, and led on up the slope. At the top they came under so heavy a fire from the Mill position that there was no alternative but to attack.

"The barrage had gone on during the delay caused by the taking of the sunken road, and there was no cover once the hill crest was gained. A fierce fire action set in, under cover of which a small party worked round the flank of the enemy. From the vantage point thus gained a charge was made and the enemy surrendered.

"The Norfolk Regiment was fighting more on the left of the front, and did not come up for some time after the capture of the Mill position.

"This fighting had again entirely disorganized companies, and even platoons, and, under cover of the copse, the Battalion was reorganized. A further advance on Doon Hill was now made. The battalions on both flanks were some way behind and out of sight from Doon Mill. Forward, Battalion headquarters were in touch with the old line and back to Brigade headquarters by visual signals.

"At the bottom of Doon Hill, on which a few of the enemy were captured, a ridge running laterally across our front covered the road, which was our final objective, from view. As soon as the leading companies reached the top of this ridge, a storm of shells burst amongst them at close range. The ground scouts had failed to see a 6-gun battery hidden in a hedgerow about 800 yards rather to our right front. Away to our left front, about 1,000 yards, another 6-gun battery caught us in enfilade.

"Nothing could live on the ridge, on which shells from twelve guns firing rapid gun fire were bursting at the rate of about fifty to the minute. Lewis gun detachments attempted to get up to open fire, but did not succeed in doing so. At that moment a troop of Scots Greys appeared from the direction of Doon Mill. Their officer was shown the position of the enemy batteries and ordered to ride round the extreme right and charge the battery position from the rear or flank. An infantry party also started off to support this venture. While the cavalry subaltern was preparing (his orders were not to advance beyond Doon Mill without leave from his squadron commander) valuable time was lost.

"The distant battery opened rapid gun fire on the ridge, under cover of which the nearer battery managed to limber up and gallop off. It was a fine piece of work of the German gunners, and we seemed to have missed a splendid

Digitized by Google

opportunity of capturing a battery intact. It must, however, be realized that the enemy had twelve to six guns capable of firing over open sights straight at the ridge or down the valley on the left. Covering fire could be provided by the second battery, moreover there was a covered approach back from the position through a valley, within which the guns could be man-handled down a few yards of hill. Once down in this valley they could limber up in security. The outflanking party arrived too late and the cavalry never got started. Darkness now set in, and the Battalion dug in where it was. An advance to the sunken road was not advisable, for although it was our objective on paper, in reality it was at the bottom of the hill, and fresh enemy troops were reported to be debouching from Brancourt and Fresnoy le Grand on either flank. Gordon Copse, to our right rear, was also still held by the enemy. It was therefore decided to hold on to the ridge, and to await the forward movement of troops on right and left to give security to our flanks before a further advance was attempted.

"Much had to be done, organizing a defence, carrying back wounded, sending up ammunition, food and water, etc. There was a great deal of gas about from the enemy gas shells, and masks had almost continuously to be worn throughout the night, especially on Doon Mill Hill and Doon Copse. The Battalion headquarters at the former place had half its fighting strength gassed, including Major Collen (the second-in-command), Lieutenant Ross (the signalling officer), his sergeant and most of the signalling staff. As a result of this action, therefore, the Battalion lost the second-in-command, the adjutant, signalling officer, two company commanders—in all 9 officers, 152 non-commissioned officers and men, of whom 2 officers and 26 men were killed. An advance of 4,000 yards had been made. Five officers, 450 men, 6 field guns, 12 machine guns and a lot of miscellaneous booty, including some of the new anti-tank rifles, had been captured.

"On the following day, the 8th, the attack was to be continued. The Leicester Regiment passed through our line for this attack, and we became supporting battalion. As such, we moved to an area south of Mont Brehain, over on to Brancourt, and in the evening of the 9th October relieved the Norfolks in a position facing the north-east half of Bohain. Headquarters were at Jonnecourt Farm.

"At 12 midnight on the night of the relief, orders were received that the advance would be continued at dawn. The Battalion was therefore ordered to assemble on the open ground south of the maze of railway sidings, west of Bohain. This assembly was to be covered by the Norfolk Regiment, who would withdraw an hour before dawn, and, from that time on, patrols were pushed out from the Battalion to reconnoitre the town of Bohain. The enemy were reported to have evacuated the town, and this proved to be true. At dawn, therefore, the Battalion advanced on a broad front north-west of the town, with patrols in the town maintaining connection, as far as possible, with the Leicester Regiment, marching south of Bohain.

"The Americans were north of us, but their location was unknown. Our objective was the high ground, near Guyot Farm, our right was to be in touch with the Leicestershire Regiment at a certain map-reading south of the farm, our

Digitized by Google

left to be determined by the position of the Americans, but about the main road north-west of Guyot Farm.

"The first duty of the Battalion was to get in touch with the Americans. This was done at the farm and corner of the wood 1,500 yards north of Bohain, but it was found that the American troops at this point were *the reserve* battalion of their right brigade, the leading battalions being reported well on their way to Vaux Andigny. Much delay had been caused in collecting the patrols who had gone through Bohain. From Bohain onwards, operations were carried out in country practically untouched by war, amidst farms occupied by civilians, and cultivated land. The long-hoped-for open warfare had begun.

"On arrival at the objective, which was reached without fighting, a line was organized in close touch with the Leicestershire Regiment on the right. On the left, the Americans were found by patrols to be facing Vaux Andigny. Reconnoitring patrols who went out were fired on on the main road beyond the Guyot Farm track, or crossing a line south of Guyot Farm. By this means the enemy line of outposts was roughly located, but his intentions and main line of resistance were unknown.

"The Battalion spent the night concentrated in billets and bivouacs in and around the small nameless village on the main Bohain—Vaux Andigny road half-way between these two places. During the night it was covered by outposts, supplied by portions of 'C' and 'D' Companies. This outpost line ran north-east and south from Guyot Farm. Our right faced due east and was in touch with the Leicesters, whose line ran south, but clear of the wooded country on their front. Our left faced north-east astride the main road.

"The country in front was most difficult. There were three main tactical features: (1) The woods on our right gave a good covered approach for the enemy right up to our right flank. (2) Guyot Farm, on a hill from which a good view of the surrounding country could be seen. (3) The valley running north and south up to the main road from Guyot Farm, which widened out near the road to a flat open basin 800 yards square. Beyond this basin there was a ridge on which the enemy line was later found. To the west of the road the ground was high and gave good cover up to the edge of the basin mentioned above.

"A number of farm buildings were on this hill, and, at its foot, in a most exposed position, were the buildings called Vallée Hasard, which were our left.

"During the night the enemy position was most definitely located, but it was not known that the enemy had a continuous and very skilfully concealed entrenched and wired position on the ridge, or that he meant to hold it with all his energy.

"At midnight, orders were received stating that the Division would continue to advance at dawn, the 71st Brigade finding the advanced guard. Battalion orders had to be issued based on very poor information, both of the ground and of the enemy. There had been little time to reconnoitre and our maps were very inaccurate.

"These orders were issued verbally to the effect that the Battalion (less certain outpost platoons) would assemble west of the main road between the farm buildings in D.6.a. square, and the road. 'A' and 'B' Companies in the leading line, 'C' and 'D' Companies in the second line. They were to advance

Digitized by Google

north-west, left and right of Vallée Hasard Farm, and at dawn to attack the ridge across the valley. No exact frontages could be given on the ground, as it would be dark, but the right, 'B' Company, was to endeavour to reach the square block of trenches shown on the map. The ridge taken, the intention was to re-form and advance as quickly as possible on Bellevue and Les Gobelets, touch being gained with the Americans on the railway at Vaux Andigny, and being kept throughout with the Norfolks, who were to operate from Guyot Farm on our right.

"The advance was delayed by the enemy putting down a very intense barrage right across, but fortunately just short of, the point of assembly. This delay had disastrous results, for it meant that the valley had to be crossed by 'B' and 'D' Companies in daylight instead of under cover of comparative darkness. 'A' and 'C' Companies, advancing left of Vallée Hasard, having better cover, managed to reach the road. The leading company came in touch with the Americans, who were dug in on the road itself, waiting for the situation at Vaux Andigny to develop. The enemy prospective barrage had dropped in front of them and our advance was checked. The leading company therefore continued the line held on the road by the Americans.

"Battalion headquarters, with two 18-pounder guns attached, had followed these companies. An officer's reconnoitring party, including the commanding officer and the gunner liaison officer, went forward on to the first undulation, from which a good view of the valley on the right was obtained.

"From this vantage point it could be seen that 'B' and 'D' Companies were about to debouch from the road cutting and farm buildings of Vallée Hasard, in order to advance across the open valley, full in the face of the enemy trench line, which could now be clearly seen on the ridge. The attackers themselves were ignorant of their danger, for the enemy line was well camouflaged and remained silent. The orderly who was sent to halt them arrived too late to stop 'B' Company, and the guns could not be got on to the target in time to help, as 'B' Company, in two waves, advanced at a walk, but hardly had they crossed the road from cover when the enemy line blazed into a terrific fire. To the onlookers on the ridge the Company seemed to melt away; many fell, and the rest, unable to face the hail of bullets, lay down. The enemy soon ceased fire, and contented himself with only firing if any attempted to crawl forward or back.

"Some company stretcher-bearers gallantly walked out from cover, crossed the road, and went forward into the open to tend the wounded. The enemy, seeing their purpose, refrained from firing, so long as no one unwounded tried to take advantage.

"No numbers could ever hope to cross the valley in face of the enemy fire, or, if they had done so, still less could they have cut the wire which guarded the enemy line. 'D' Company was therefore withdrawn, before they had shown themselves. This company, with about 30 of 'B' Company, including Captain Sheldon, the company commander, who had managed to run or crawl back, in spite of the enemy, were marched round, under cover, to the rear of 'A' and 'C' Companies on the left.

"The whole attack along the Brigade line was now held up, for the Norfolk and Leicestershire Regiments had failed to advance any appreciable distance.

Digitized by Google

"Our left, however, had a footing on the enemy position, and it was determined to throw the whole of the three companies available, 'A,' 'C' and 'D,' against the enemy forward position on the left, and, if successful, against Belle Vue Ridge. If this ridge was taken, the whole of the enemy forward position in East 7.b.d. would be outflanked, and the Norfolk and Leicester attack would be greatly assisted.

"The Americans, on our left, had penetrated as far as the church in Vaux Andigny, and, it was hoped, would keep enemy troops north of the railway fully occupied. With three companies attacking it looked as if the enemy forward position in West 25.b. and d., south of the railway, should fall without difficulty, for a covered approach was available. 'A' and 'D' Companies, with 'C' in support, were reformed, and attacked the sunken road along the top of the ridge. The leading companies charged with the bayonet, and the enemy fled, but 'A' Company, on the left, had many casualties from enfilade fire from the heights west of Vaux Andigny, this, in spite of the covering fire provided by a trench mortar detachment attached to the Battalion, and the two attached artillery guns. Captain Sheldon and his party of 'B' Company joined in the fight, and actually took the square trench system, which was their original objective, from the flank. The Norfolk Regiment was now over 1,000 yards to our right rear, but the gap between did not admit of a counter-attack on account of the valley which we now commanded. On the left we were in close touch with the Americans. The enemy artillery barrage and machine-gun fire on the sunken road effectually checked any further advance. The sunken road was a death trap from which no forward movement could be made, at any rate until the high ground just north-west of Vaux Andigny was taken. Darkness soon gave the longed-for cover, and rations and water could be sent up to the troops at last.

"Under cover of darkness the line was reorganized, 'A' Company was given a point from the railway to the square trench system, 'B' Company that system and a thin line of posts which was swung back to the right rear. 'C' Company entrenched on the undulation south-east of the valley in D.6.d. square, 'D' Company in reserve but supplying a strong post at Guyot Farm (which that day had been the headquarters of the Norfolk Regiment and had been almost entirely demolished by shell fire).

"The line was handed over in this position on the evening of the 12th October to the Durham Light Infantry. All companies had suffered casualties, being all about half strength.

"At the end of this trying day two companies were commanded by second-lieutenants who had never been in action before, and one by a lieutenant who had practically no experience. The Battalion was exhausted, but patrols went out and close touch was kept with the enemy. Firing continued most of the night. The shell fire throughout the day had been terrific. This was not our notion of the pursuit of a beaten enemy of which we had read so much in the papers, for fresh troops had come up to hold the enemy line. As it turned out later, the Battalion front was afterwards taken over by a brigade, which did not succeed in taking the enemy position at Bellevue without carefully prepared trench attack, covered by a heavy barrage and greatly assisted by a fog. The

Digitized by Google

Sherwood Forester Territorial Brigade of the 47th Division took part in this attack and earned great praise.

"On relief after this action the Battalion marched back to billets in Bohain, and later back to Fresnoy le Grand. The Battalion, though not entirely successful in this action, took important ground which gave the division which followed a jumping-off point and opportunity to observe and reconnoitre, without which their task would have been well-nigh impossible on this portion of the front. The strength of the enemy position lay in Vallée Hasard, we had taken the valley, and approach to the enemy was now possible."

The casualties in the Battalion from October 6th to 12th amounted to: killed, 2 officers—Lieutenant J. Tombazis, M.C., and Second-Lieutenant R. F. Dicksee—and 47 other ranks; wounded, 7 officers and 145 other ranks, while 9 men were missing; the wounded officers were Captains P. Hardy, J. I. W. Cowgill, M.C., and L. Cashmore, M.C., Lieutenants T. W. C. Irwin and F. E. Bennett, Second-Lieutenants H. H. Proctor and H. H. March, M.C.

The good work of the 6th Division received due recognition in the following messages received; from the Army Commander (General Rawlinson) came:—

"*Will you please convey to the 6th Division my warm thanks and hearty congratulations on their success. They have done admirable work, and I wish them all good luck.*"

The Corps Commander's message (General Braithwaite) ran as follows:—

"*Well done 6th Division! So glad casualties so light considering what the Division has accomplished.*"

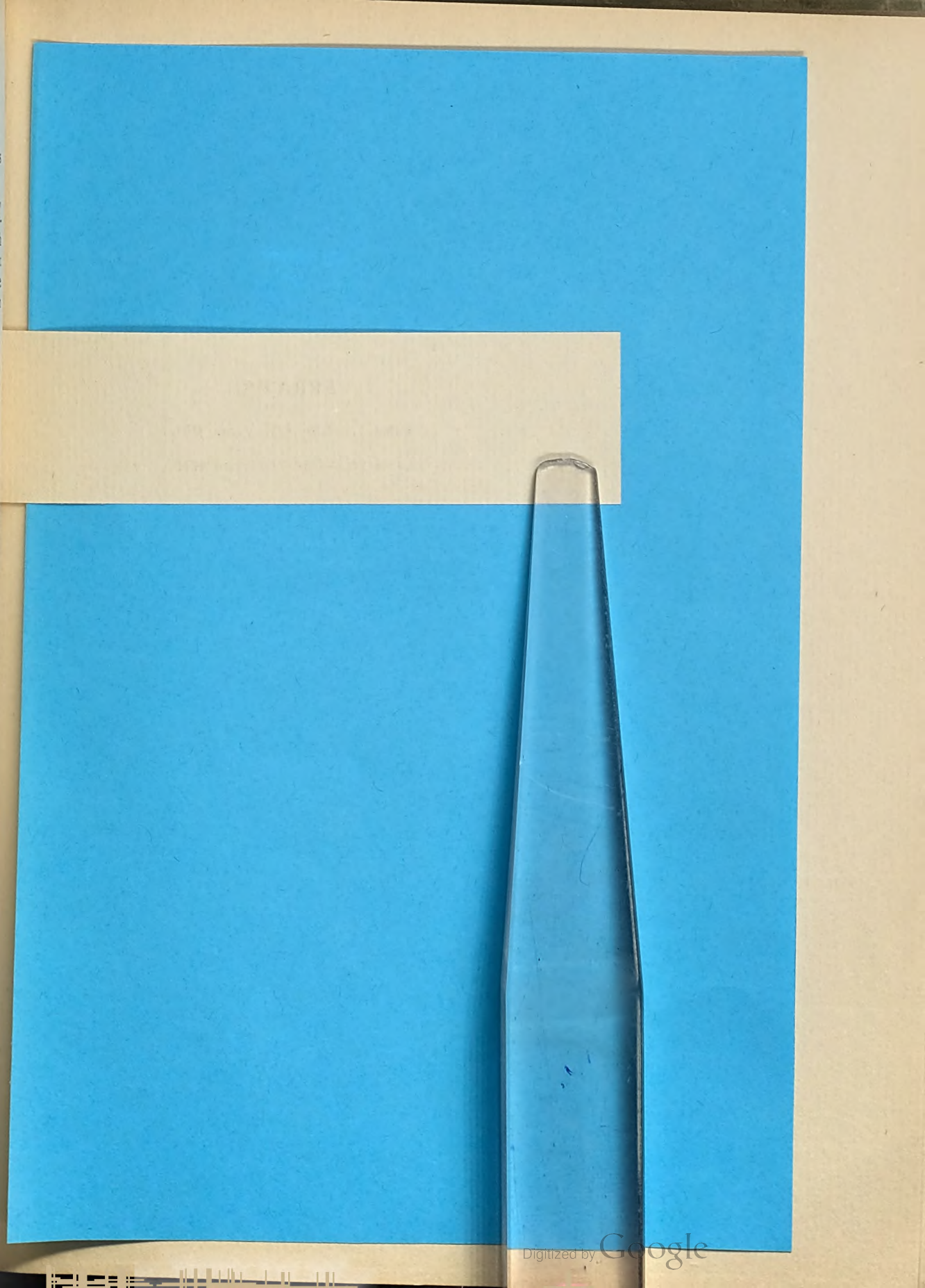
"On the 14th the Battalion again returned to the same front, being relieved on the 17th by the 47th Division, who attacked. During these few days the shelling was very heavy, but our numbers being so small only few casualties were sustained. 'A' Company one night unfortunately had 14 gassed. It was not realized that the mustard gas in the sunken road exuded for days after from the ground.

"When the Battalion, still only about two companies strong, returned to the line on the 20th and 21st, we found the enemy reported to be occupying a trench line hidden in the thick, close-hedged country just beyond the village of Bazuel, running through the centre of R.2 and R.9. Their exact position was unknown, and the village of Bazuel itself was too thick with enemy and our own shell gas to enter. The approach march was made from billets in Bohain. The assembly point was to be on the main road to Vaux Andigny. The Leicestershire and Norfolk Regiments left by lorries, which were to return in the morning to take the Battalion to St. Souplet. The Battalion was to leave at 2 p.m., and arrived to time, but the lorries were delayed by traffic on their return journey, and it was not until dusk at about 6 p.m. that the Battalion got away.

"The lorries, however, could not be got through to St. Souplet owing to the traffic, and the Battalion was put down some miles this side of St. Souplet in the dark, and had to march on. We were given a hot meal at the transport lines which had been sent on to bivouac near St. Souplet.

"Brigade headquarters were in the village, and the Battalion was ordered to march on that night to a map square Q.18.b., a distance of four miles by the

Digitized by Google


Digitized by Google

ERRATA

LINE 1.—*For* 47th *read* 46th

LINE 25.—*For* 47th *read* 46th

Digitized by Google

most direct route, practically across country, for the only tracks were nearly obliterated, and by main road the distance would have been doubled.

"It had been raining all day, and the men were very wet and tired. This march across country in the dark and rain over indescribably muddy and entirely unknown ways was a veritable nightmare. No provision had been possible for an advance party, as orders were not received until too late, and then it was not known from whom we were to take over, or their actual position at the end of the day's fighting. We were told we would find the brigade headquarters of the battalion we were to relieve at Le Quennelet Farm. Only one map was available, and for this reason no advance party could yet be sent forward.

"At length the Battalion arrived at brigade headquarters. The commanding officer was informed that the battalion we were to relieve had dug themselves in on the sunken cross-roads in Q.18.d. They had naturally been expecting relief since about 6 p.m., and had been allowed to vacate their position, which was in support, at about 9 p.m., after having been heavily shelled. The Battalion continued the march by companies at intervals. Five hundred yards short of the cross-roads, the enemy dropped a heavy barrage right on the cross-roads. Another halt was necessary to avoid this, and during a lull in the shelling, platoons were doubled through the cross-roads and given hedgerows in the fields beyond, under cover of which to dig in. The whole Battalion got through. Two cookers and a water cart had been brought to provide a hot meal. The only casualties sustained were the water cart horse killed, and its rider badly shaken.

"Following on this march, that night, or what was left of it, must have been one of the worst ever spent by the Battalion. It was pouring with rain, and there was no sort of cover from weather or shelling, except what could be improvised by enlarging shell-holes, and by the use of waterproof sheets. The shell fire, however, was erratic, and more annoying than dangerous. The surrounding country was entirely unknown. We were in support of the Norfolk and Leicestershire Regiments, who had taken over the so-called line in front of Bazuel many hours before, but beyond that we knew nothing, and it was hopeless to attempt to do much before morning. Numerous working parties went up to the front line during the 22nd October, and reconnaissances were made to the front line. By the use of old German blankets, etc., more comfort was possible.

"On the following day, the 23rd October, an attack was to be carried out in conjunction with troops on the flanks. The Brigade was to attack through the dense country north-east of Bazuel, the Leicestershires on the left, the Norfolks on the right, ourselves in support. The right of the Brigade objective was the Bazuel—Ors road, the left was the central ride, running north through the Bois l'Eveque. The Division was the southern and outer division of the British forces, and on the right of the Fourth Army, which was engaged on a wheel to the north-east. This manœuvre meant that the right was continually refused, and was therefore the more open and dangerous flank. The Brigade on our right was to wheel on to the Sambre—Oise Canal. The French were operating to the south, in order to take the canal in reverse.

"The attack was assisted by tanks, whose duties included breaking through

Digitized by Google

the hedgerows which, especially on the Norfolk front, were very thick, and in nearly all cases were made still more impenetrable by strong wire fences in their midst. As the enemy invariably put down a heavy barrage at dawn, it was decided that the attack should be launched at 1 a.m. in the hopes of avoiding the shelling of the assembly.

"The Battalion was very weak, having only six officers, including the commanding officer and the adjutant, in the line. The night before, Divisional headquarters had sent four officers of other regiments up to report for duty. Two of these were found to be suffering from shell shock, and so the Battalion went into this action with only eight officers, and its four companies organized as two, for purposes of command. At about 1.30 a.m. the approach march of the Battalion was begun, being made by platoons at intervals to the point of assembly of the attacking battalions, a distance of about 1,000 yards through difficult country and in pitch darkness.

"The Battalion was at the time ordered to dig in on the single railway line facing north-east and east of Bazuel. Reconnoitring parties were sent out to ascertain the situation. After an hour's time the parties returned, and a cautious advance was begun with the assistance of tanks. This advance by slow stages was continued all the morning, the enemy fighting fiercely under the cover of the hedgerows, etc. The enemy practice was to let the tanks go through and to spring up again behind them.

"By midday the Battalion, still in hand, had succeeded in establishing touch with troops on both flanks, on the left with the Leicestershires, and late that evening held a line on the Bazuel—Ors road in a half circle through Ors railway sidings to the edge of the wood. That night the Leicestershires on the left were withdrawn, and the following night the Battalion handed over the whole of the Brigade front of about 1,200 yards to the relieving units.

"In the action itself comparatively few casualties were sustained, but the Regiment, in its last action of the war, had nobly played its part, and all ranks had good reason for feeling proud that by their steadiness they had brought what might have been a severe reverse to a very satisfactory result."

During the night of the 23rd the 71st Brigade was relieved by the 16th, which on the morning of the 24th renewed the attack; opposition by this had lessened, and good progress was made on this and succeeding days all along the front of the Division, so that by the evening of the 28th a bridge-head had been established across the canal at Ors, and posts on the west side commanded the canal on the whole front.

On the night of October 30th—31st the relief of the 6th Division by the 32nd was completed, and it withdrew to billets in Fresnoy le Grand, whence it moved to Bohain on November 6th, by which date the IXth Corps had advanced fifty miles in the last seven weeks, fighting all the way, and had captured not far short of 17,000 prisoners and 318 guns.

As a result of these successes, and those gained by other corps, the Germans began to fall back on practically the whole battle front on the night of November 4th—5th, and by the 9th the enemy was in full retreat before the Allied armies. Hindenburg and Ludendorff—men who had up to now been regarded in Germany almost as gods—at last admitted defeat, Germany was in

Digitized by Google

revolution, the High Seas Fleet refused to move out of harbour and raised the red flag, and the Emperor and his heir fled into Holland. And then, on the evening of Thursday, November 7th, the German delegates entered the French lines deputed to make what terms they could. Their ridiculous proposals for a truce were at once brushed aside, and at 5 a.m. on the 11th they signed in haste and thankfulness the terms which Marshal Foch demanded. These were briefly that all Allied prisoners were to be at once returned, the left bank of the Rhine was to be handed over, 5,000 guns, 3,000 machine guns and 2,000 aeroplanes were to be at once surrendered, and all submarines and a large portion of the German ships of war were provisionally to be given up to the care of the Allies.

"The military situation on the British front on the morning of the 11th November can be stated very shortly. In the fighting since the 1st November our troops had broken the enemy's resistance beyond possibility of recovery, and had forced on him a disorderly retreat along the whole front of the British Armies. Thereafter the enemy was capable neither of accepting nor refusing battle. The utter confusion of his troops, the state of his railways congested with abandoned trains, the capture of huge quantities of rolling stock and material, all showed that our attack had been decisive. . . . A continuance of hostilities could only have meant disaster to the German armies and the armed invasion of Germany."*

At 11 a.m. on November 11th the right of the Fourth Army was east of the Franco-Belgian frontier, and thence northwards our troops had reached the general line Sivry—Erquelines—Boussu—Jurbise—Herghies—Ghislenghien—Lassines—Grammont.

Very shortly after 11 o'clock a message of immense historical importance was sent round to all units of the 6th Division:

"*G.861. 11th.*

"*Hostilities ceased at 11.00 hours this morning.*

"*6th Div. H.Q.* (*Sd.*) "*T. T. Grove, Lt.-Colonel,*
"*General Staff.*"

Accounts vary very considerably as to the manner of the reception of this wonderful message: some historians tell us that a great burst of cheering arose along the whole battle front from the sea to the Vosges; others tell us—and it seems the more probable story—that the news of the end of the war was received almost in silence by those steadfast men who had brought it about; they found it difficult to believe that the four years were over and that the long strain was past, and were thinking perhaps rather of the many good comrades who had fallen, who had helped to gain the victory and who had not lived to see its fulfilment. At home in England men and women gave themselves up wholeheartedly to rejoicing, and if with some of these their methods of expression seemed out of place, one must remember how great had been the strain and how well the nation had come through those days—and nights—of deepest anxiety. None who witnessed it can ever forget the sight of that great procession of Londoners who, so soon as the news was published, made their way in their thousands to the Palace, confident that their King, who had been one with them in heart

* Despatch of December 21st, 1918.

Digitized by Google

and soul during the war, was rejoicing as they were that peace had at long last descended upon a troubled world.

To his soldiers in the field and their leader, His Majesty sent the following words of heartfelt congratulation :—

" No words can express my feelings of admiration for the glorious British Army whose splendid bravery under your leadership has now achieved this magnificent success over the enemy. You have fought without ceasing for the past four years. My warmest congratulations to you and your undaunted Army, where all ranks, with mutual confidence in each other, have faced hardships and danger with dogged resolution and have fought with an irresistible determination that has now resulted in this final and overwhelming victory."

In announcing on this day to Parliament the terms of the armistice concluded with the representatives of the enemy nations, the Prime Minister spoke as follows :—

" Thus at 11 o'clock this morning came to an end the cruellest and most terrible war that has ever scourged mankind. I hope we may say that thus, this fateful morning, came to an end all wars. This is no time for words. Our hearts are too full of gratitude to which no tongue can give adequate expression. I will therefore move that the House do immediately adjourn until this time to-morrow, and that we, the House of Commons, proceed to St. Margaret's to give humble and renewed thanks for the great deliverance of the world from its great peril."

The World War was over.

The following are the names of those who served throughout, from beginning to end, with the Battalion: Lieutenant-Colonel and Quartermaster F. Tomlinson, O.B.E., M.C., Regimental Quartermaster-Sergeant W. Noble, Sergeant (Orderly-room Clerk) E. J. Lound, M.M., Transport-Sergeant G. W. Wilson, D.C.M., M.M., Sergeant-Cook F. Barratt, Sergeant-Shoemaker C. H. Battersby, Sergeant H. Dodge, M.M., Lance-Sergeant J. Loverseed, Corporal T. Pridmore, Lance-Corporal G. W. Clay, Acting Company Sergeant-Major G. Oakes, M.M., Acting Company Quartermaster-Sergeant F. Penn, Corporals C. Bentley, J. Howes, A. J. Coventry and J. H. Pownall, Lance-Corporal W. H. Lowe, Bandsman J. Hallowes, Drummer E. R. Squires, Privates W. H. Clay, R. Harrison, G. T. Hyde, P. Joyce, J. H. Spencer, J. E. Hagger, E. Maltby, R. Stevenson, A. Williams, T. Baines and F. E. Brown.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VIII.

1918—1919.

THE MARCH INTO GERMANY—DEMOBILIZATION—THE RETURN OF THE CADRE.

DURING the month of November, and especially during the early part of it, the Battalion received substantial reinforcements, particularly in officers, no fewer than 18 of these joining in addition to 88 other ranks: the officers were Second-Lieutenants S. G. Berry, S. Smith, A. A. Woolley, A. Jarratt, R. E. Cope, G. J. R. Donaldson, D. Newton, V. Harrison, H. A. Brown, L. C. Varney, A. F. Keech, W. A. Keyworth, C. A. Frereson, A. J. Watkin, F. K. Ellissen, J. A. Chalmers, H. F. Hill and F. McDonnell.

The IXth Corps was now transferred to the Second Army, under General Sir H. Plumer, to whom was assigned the command of the British Army of Occupation in Germany, and on leaving the Fourth Army the following letter was received by the General Officer Commanding 6th Division from General Sir Henry Rawlinson:—

"*Now that the 6th Division is passing to the command of another Army, I desire to place on record my sincere appreciation and warm thanks for the valuable services rendered by you since you joined the Fourth Army in September last.*

"*The Division has passed through strenuous times and has seen some heavy fighting, especially in September between Holnon Wood and the Canal, and at Bohain and Vaux Andigny in October, where the gallantry and determination of all ranks filled me with admiration.*

"*I congratulate most heartily you all on the victories you have won, and trust that at some future time I may again find the Division under my command.*"

On the 14th the Battalion started on the march to the Rhine, proceeding by easy stages via Catillon, Prisches, Château Hugemont, Solre le Château and Solre St. Gery, to Silenrieux, which was reached on the 24th, and where a halt was made for several days. Here, for the Brigade cross-country race over a very stiff course of about 3½ miles, the Battalion turned out 475 starters, and provided the first and second in Private Clemerson and Lance-Sergeant Loverseed, the winner's time being 16 minutes.

Silenrieux was left on December 1st, and marching on by Corennes, Gerin, Bouvignies, Halloy, Achet, Ossogne, Warzee, Awan and La Gleize, the Battalion on December 13th crossed the frontier into Germany, reaching Malmedy. "It was pouring with rain," so the Battalion diary tells us, "and there was no demonstration of any sort on crossing the border. Malmedy was a welcome change after the small Belgian villages, and in these, our first German billets, we were made very comfortable. We expected to stay here a few days, but we moved on, leaving 'B' Company, under Captain Sheldon, as special

Digitized by Google

guard for the Corps headquarters, to Truppenlager Elsenborn, the Battalion forming the advance guard to the Brigade group. This place was a Hun camp, capable of holding a very large number of men, with good training grounds round it: the camp itself was dirty. 15th.—Marched to Montjoie, down hill all the way, very good billets and a nice clean town."

The occasional long halts at the outset of the march were occasioned by the difficulty experienced in feeding the leading divisions, the necessity in some cases of supplying rations to the French population, by the destruction caused by the Germans to the roads and railways, and also owing to the German retirement not being always carried out according to programme. Up to the Belgian frontier the roads had been cut and the bridges blown up, and these impeded the onward march. Once across the frontier the roads were splendid, the inhabitants most hospitable and enthusiastic, and the advance was pushed as continuously as possible. "However," the Divisional History records, "it was no hardship to be delayed in such charming surroundings, though the weather was for the most part vile. The march from the neighbourhood of Dinant across the Ardennes, and along the lovely valley of the River Amblève, will always stand out as a most delightful reminiscence. All ranks worked hard at their equipment, and the transport was so smart as to be thought by the Belgians to be new. It was a proud and splendid Division which marched, with drums beating and Colours flying, across the German frontier into the little town of Malmedy. Marching generally by only one road, the length of the Division, when billeted, varied from ten to twenty-five miles. It was particularly interesting for brigades to occupy the German huts at Elsenborn Camp, where large numbers of the enemy had assembled in the end of July, 1914, for the conquest of Belgium.

"The attitude of the population in Germany was servile, and little hate could be felt by one or two battalions which marched into Malmedy in pouring rain and found German women lighting special fires, without being ordered to do so, to dry their clothing. It must, however, be added that the inhabitants of Malmedy speak French and have Belgian sympathies."

On December 16th the Battalion was at Eicherscheid, where a halt was made for two days, and here, we read in the diary, "the C.O. and some of the officers went deer-hunting under the guidance of a Hun gamekeeper, but brought back nothing"—but whether this was the fault of the deer, the gamekeeper or the marksmanship of the C.O. and his attendant sportsmen the diary does not reveal!

Moving on again on the 19th the Battalion reached Heimbach—"a nice town hidden in the valley and reminiscent of Derbyshire," was at Fischenich, via Fussenich and Friesheim, on the 23rd, and at Fischenich Christmas Day was passed, but unhappily, "owing to supply difficulties, the extra food ordered through the Division did not arrive, and in consequence there was no special dinner. Here Second-Lieutenant Sandall joined, and then, on the 29th, the Battalion completed the last lap of its 220-mile march to the Rhine by arriving at Bruhl—"a nice clean town. All the Battalion, with the exception of one company, billeted in the College. Good billets, with beds or mattresses for the majority."

Digitized by Google

6TH DIVISION.

BATTLE OF THE HUNDRED DAYS AND MARCH TO THE RHINE 1918

Battle of the hundred days:

Took over line in **HOLNON WOOD** - - 13th Sept.

Principal Engagements–

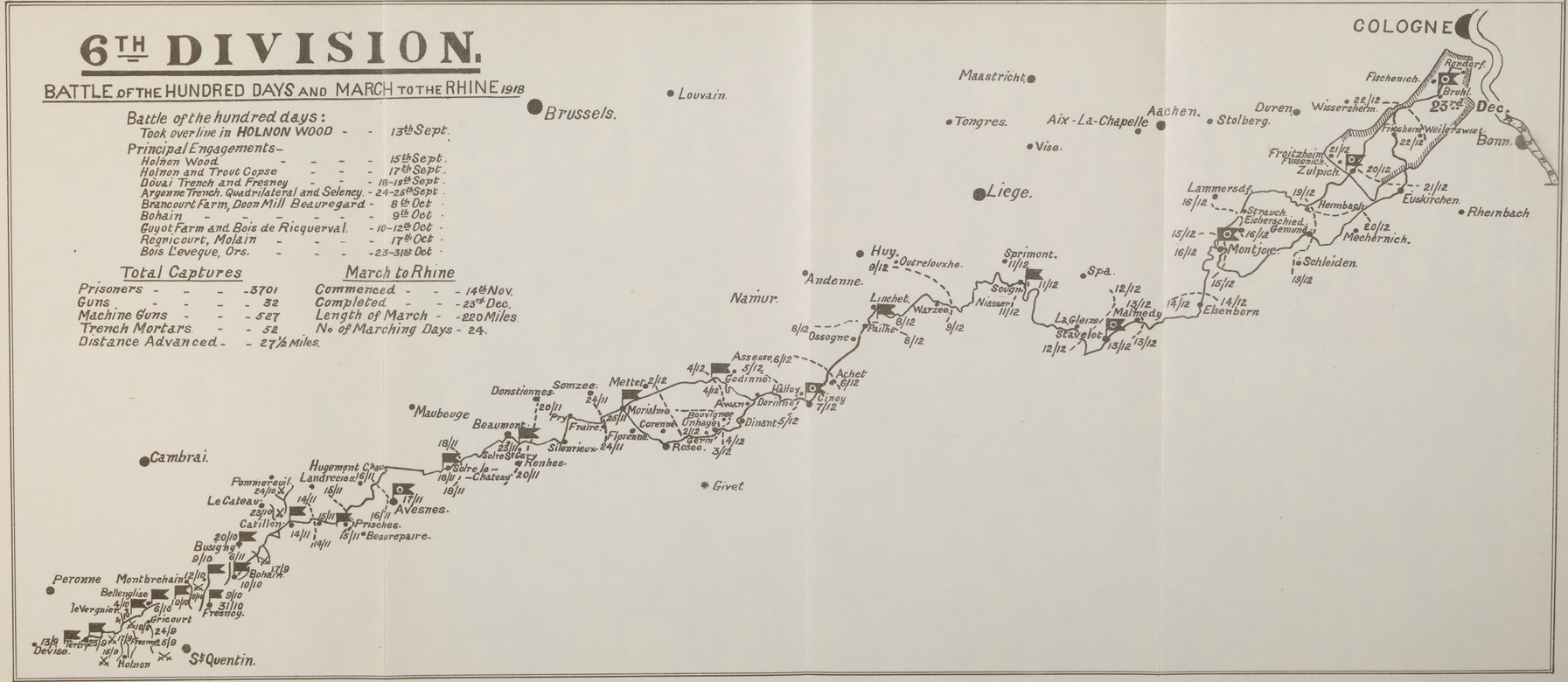
Holnon Wood - - - -	15th Sept.
Holnon and Trout Copse - - -	17th Sept.
Douai Trench and Fresnoy - -	18-19th Sept.
Argonne Trench. Quadrilateral and Selency.	24-25th Sept.
Brancourt Farm, Doon Mill Beauregard -	8th Oct.
Bohain - - - - -	9th Oct.
Guyot Farm and Bois de Ricquerval.	10-12th Oct.
Regnicourt, Molain - - -	17th Oct.
Bois L'eveque, Ors. - - -	23-31st Oct.

Total Captures

Prisoners - - -	3701
Guns - - -	32
Machine Guns - -	527
Trench Mortars - -	52
Distance Advanced -	27½ Miles.

March to Rhine

Commenced - - -	14th Nov.
Completed - - -	25th Dec.
Length of March -	220 Miles.
No of Marching Days -	24.



The Sherwood Foresters

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
ASTOR, LENOX
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS

Digitized by Google

During this long march, much of it in very inclement weather and through a hilly country, only 23 men of the Battalion fell out, and the majority of these were suffering from influenza, which was very prevalent. The march was carried out in full marching order, and the Colours were carried throughout, Second-Lieutenants Keech and Newton being the Colour bearers. A party under Captain Sheldon had been sent home from Prisches to fetch the Colours on November 15th.

On the conclusion of the march the General Officer Commanding the 6th Division congratulated all ranks on their "steady marching, excellent turn-out and high standard of march discipline," remarks which were cordially endorsed by the Brigadier.

The following is the roll of the officers who were serving in the 2nd Battalion Sherwood Foresters during this month:—Lieutenant-Colonel C. E. Hudson, V.C., D.S.O., M.C., in command; Majors F. D. Collen, M.C., second-in-command, and F. Tomlinson, M.C., quartermaster; Captains A. L. Gill, M.C. (adjutant), J. Sheldon, D.S.O., M.C. (commanding "B" Company), J. R. B. Herron (commanding "A" Company), A. V. Davies (commanding "C" Company), and A. H. A. Giles, D.S.O., M.C. (commanding "D" Company); Lieutenants C. F. G. Everett (transport officer), G. J. J. Ross (signalling officer), C. E. B. M. Smith and J. W. Bowey; Second-Lieutenants A. T. McDonald, A. J. Rawlins, T. P. Plant, F. McDonnell, G. P. Cooper, A. Gray, C. B. Keatley, H. F. Freeth, L. W. Hawkins, S. G. Berry, V. Harrison, A. A. Woolley, A. F. Keech, J. E. Watson, J. Little, F. K. Ellissen, A. J. Wood, H. F. Hill, L. C. Varney, (assistant adjutant), A. J. Watkin, V. A. Gerard, W. A. Keyworth, D. Newton, H. A. Brown, R. E. Cope, W. Hackman and J. W. Sandall, with Lieutenant E. C. Chamnass, of the United States Army, as medical officer.

The area allotted to the Division was a strip of country almost rectangular in shape, with a maximum length of twenty miles and a maximum breadth of twelve miles, and lying to the immediate south-west of Cologne. The north-west border ran along the ring of forts encircling the city, which were later included in the divisional area.

Early in the New Year the new educational training scheme was started in the Battalion, the men showing great keenness and attending very freely. On the 7th Lieutenant-Colonel Hudson was admitted to hospital and Major Collen assumed command in his stead, while about the same time Captain G. S. Dobbie and Lieutenant W. A. Ebsworth joined the Battalion. But while 68 other ranks also joined the service companies on the Rhine, demobilization had already begun, no fewer than 7 officers and 138 non-commissioned officers and men returning to civil life during the month of January.

On February 2nd the 2nd Sherwood Foresters moved from Bruhl into Cologne, the headquarters occupying Marienburg Barracks, while detachments were furnished to certain of the outlying forts. On the 17th Lieutenant-Colonel Milward arrived from the IXth Corps Concentration Camp and took over command of the Battalion, and training, professional and educational, now proceeded with great intensity, relieved by football matches against other corps and departments in which the Battalion more than held its own, in spite of the

Digitized by Google

fact that officers and other ranks were almost daily leaving on demobilization or on transfer to other corps as volunteers for or retainable for the Army of Occupation.

During the month of March the following left or were absent from the Battalion :—

Demobilized, 3 officers and 180 other ranks; transferred to 11th Battalion Leicester Regiment, 9 officers and 295 other ranks; sick in hospital, 5 officers and 23 other ranks; accidentally injured, 2 other ranks; total, 17 officers and 500 other ranks.

The Divisional and Brigade formations being now about to be broken up, the following farewell orders were issued: from Brigadier-General Brown, commanding 71st Infantry Brigade, on March 10th :—

" Now that the demobilization of the greater part of the British Expeditionary Force and the reforming of our peace garrisons at home and abroad necessitate the breaking up of the 71st Infantry Brigade—commencing to-morrow—I desire to place on record my very high appreciation of the services of all ranks, from the highest to the lowest, and to thank all from the bottom of my heart for their unfailing support, cheerful endurance of hardship and marked devotion to duty on every occasion.

" I have now had the honour and pleasure of commanding the Brigade for 19 months, and during that period we have had our share of hard knocks. The milestones of the period were the victorious attacks at Cambrai on 20th November, 1917, followed ten days later by the enemy's counter-attack, when the steadiness of the Brigade north of Marcoing—all troops on their right having temporarily been driven back—was most marked; the enemy's offensive on March 21st and 22nd, 1918, when the Brigade suffered such heavy casualties, but maintained its position in the Corps line until relieved on the evening of the latter date; the enemy's offensive against the Channel ports in April, 1918, when the Brigade, composed mainly of new drafts, fought with its usual gallantry south of Mont Kemmel, earning the special thanks of the commander of the Division to which it was attached; and lastly, the victorious advance from September 18th to October 30th which resulted in the enemy suing for an armistice.

" Between these different dates were the discomforts and hardships of the seemingly never-ending trench warfare, demanding almost as high a standard of valour and determination as the more active phases.

" We all deplore the loss of many gallant friends, who so worthily upheld the fine traditions of their regiments and who will never be forgotten. Those who are left may with certainty look back with pride in years to come on the part they played in the 71st Infantry Brigade.

" Once again I thank you for the support you have at all times given me, and, whatever the future may hold for you, I wish you all the very best of luck. Good-bye and God-speed."

From Major-General Marden came the following message of farewell, which contained also a recapitulation of the services of the Division :—

" The 6th Division, as it has been known to England during the Great War, is being broken up, the artillery and infantry passing to other formations

Digitized by Google

in the Regular Army and the remainder being transferred to the new Midland Division.

"Commencing with the victory on the Aisne, the 6th Division, under Major-General Sir John Keir, K.C.B., took part in the heavy fighting in October, 1914, round Armentières which really formed part of the First Battle of Ypres, and which marked the introduction of trench warfare. The Division remained in the vicinity of this town until the Second Battle of Ypres, when it was brought up to hold that difficult front. During the year spent in Flanders the capture of Hooge by the 16th and 18th Infantry Brigades—the first occasion on which an artillery barrage was used—and a gallant and successful attack of the 1st K.S.L.I. on a position astride the Ypres—Langemarck road were the outstanding features. During this period, too, the 71st Infantry Brigade replaced the 17th Infantry Brigade, transferred to the 24th Division in October, 1915, after the Battle of Loos, and the command changed twice, Major-General Sir Walter Congreve, V.C., K.C.B., M.V.O., succeeding General Keir, transferred to the command of the VIth Corps on 27th May, 1915, and Major-General C. Ross, C.B., replacing General Congreve on the promotion of the latter to the command of the XIIIth Corps. From Ypres the 6th Division went to the Somme, where in September and October, 1916, it had very severe fighting at the capture of the Quadrilateral near Ginchy, and the actions at Les Bœufs and Gueudecourt, suffering heavy casualties. Then followed a long period of trench warfare in the Loos—Hulluch sector, including many brilliant raids and a short period of severe fighting in April at Hill 70, conducted with the greatest determination and gallantry, in aid of larger operations by the Canadian Corps on the immediate south.

"On the 19th August, 1917, the Division came under my command, and the three Infantry Brigades changed commanders almost simultaneously, Brigadier-General E. Feetham, C.B., C.M.G., commanding 71st Infantry Brigade, being promoted to the 39th Division, and Brigadier-Generals R. J. Bridgford, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., and W. L. Osborn, C.M.G., D.S.O., going home for a rest after a long period of harassing fighting.

"The Division first consolidated Hill 70, captured by the Canadians, and then prepared an attack on Lens, which was eventually abandoned in favour of the Cambrai offensive with large numbers of tanks. On 20th November, 1917, the Division attacked and achieved a notable success with light losses, but suffered fairly heavy casualties in holding up the German counter-attack from 30th November to 10th December.

"In this the 16th Infantry Brigade did splendid work and the 14th D.L.I. made a lasting name at the defence of Marcoing on 3rd December, where also a newly-formed company of the 6th Machine Gun Battalion greatly distinguished itself.

"After a month's partial rest—two brigades doing short spells in the Bullecourt sector—the Division occupied the trench system east of Bapaume, being reduced, by the loss of the 9th Suffolk, 8th Bedford Regiments and the 14th D.L.I. to ten battalions. On March 21st and 22nd, 1918, the Division, on a widely-extended front, of which Lagnicourt was the centre, sustained the full brunt of the German offensive, losing very heavily, but holding up the attack

Digitized by Google

till reinforcements could arrive. Then followed five months of prolonged strain in the Ypres—Kemmel sector, during which the Division fought alongside the French, trained several battalions of the 27th American Division, and built up from its reserve and partly-trained men a hardened force for the final Allied counter-offensive. Notable during this time was the detachment of the 71st Infantry Brigade to stem the German advance near Neuve Eglise in May, 1918, where the 9th Norfolk Regiment especially suffered heavy casualties; the successful attack of the 11th Essex Regiment on 28th May to restore the broken line of the French on our right flank; the brilliant capture of Ridge Wood and Elzenwalle by the 1st West Yorkshire Regiment and the 2nd D.L.I. on 14th July, and the brilliant daylight raid of the 1st Buffs a little later.

"About 1st September, 1918, the Division was moved south to the Somme, and by the 14th September came into the line at Holnon Wood, near St. Quentin, where it commenced the almost continuous two and a half months' fighting which practically coincided with the cessation of hostilities. From the 14th September to the 8th October the Division held the post of honour on the right of the British offensive. The preliminary operations in Holnon Wood were marked by the success of the 18th Infantry Brigade. On the 18th and 19th September the 16th and 71st Infantry Brigades, under most adverse conditions, attacked the immensely strong positions which dominated St. Quentin and suffered very heavy losses, but, behaving with the greatest gallantry, got their claws firmly embedded in the enemy defensive system, which finally yielded to the tenacious fighting of the 16th and 18th Infantry Brigades (with the 1st Leicester Regiment) on the 24th and 25th September.

"On the 8th October the 16th and 71st Infantry Brigades captured the defensive positions east of the Hindenburg Line of which Mannequin Hill and Doon Mill were the tactical points, fighting on this occasion between the French on the right and the 30th American Division on the left. The 1st West Yorkshire Regiment especially distinguished themselves by the capture by a bombing attack, after prolonged fighting, of Mannequin and Cerise Woods on the right flank. The advance on and the fall of Bohain on 9th October, the Battle of Vaux Andigny on 17th October, and the final Battle of Ors Ridge on 24th October completed a series of operations of which any division might justly be proud.

"Throughout the war the Division has had the tremendous advantage of an artillery second to none in the British Army, and which has on all occasions, notably on 21st and 22nd March, 1918, most nobly upheld the glorious traditions of the Royal Regiment.

"The Division has also been fortunate in its R.E and Pioneers, both of which took an active and important part in opposing the great German offensive, where also the newly-formed Machine Gun Battalion proved its worth. Both Medium and Light Trench Mortar Batteries, the latter especially, have done yeoman service. The Medical Services have been pre-eminent in their care of the wounded, and have paid a heavy toll during the past year in officers and other ranks. The R.A.S.C. have done splendid work both with horse and motor transport; the R.A.V.C. have worked hard and successfully, and the

Digitized by Google

Chaplains have set an example of self-sacrifice and gallantry worthy of their high calling.

"It is hoped to publish later a short history of the part played by the 6th Division in the Great War, but owing to the many changes of command it will necessarily take some time. Information as to its publication will be given in the leading London, Midland and Yorkshire papers.

"In saying good-bye to the 6th Division, which it has been my privilege and fortune to command for the past one and a half years, I wish to thank particularly Brigadier-Generals E. F. Delaforce, C.M.G., C.R.A., G. S. G. Craufurd, C.M.G., C.I.E., D.S.O., A.D.C., commanding 18th Infantry Brigade, H. A. Walker, C.M.G., D.S.O., late commanding 16th Infantry Brigade, and P. W. Brown, C.M.G., D.S.O., commanding 71st Infantry Brigade, for their most loyal help, advice and support in all the difficult situations which have arisen during the 15 months' fighting; and to all the commanding officers, especially Lieutenant-Colonels W. H. F. Weber, C.M.G., D.S.O., commanding 2nd Brigade R.F.A., J. A. C. Forsyth, C.M.G., D.S.O., commanding 24th Brigade R.F.A., R. E. Power, D.S.O., commanding 1st Buffs, D. L. Weir, D.S.O., M.C., commanding 1st West Yorkshire Regiment, F. Latham, D.S.O., commanding 1st Leicestershire Regiment, C. H. Dumbell, D.S.O., commanding 11th Essex Regiment, H. M. Milward, D.S.O., commanding 2nd Sherwood Foresters, and J. B. Rosher, D.S.O., M.C., commanding 14th D.L.I. and 6th Machine Gun Battalion.*

"My thanks are further due to the Staff and Heads of Departments, especially Lieutenant-Colonels T. T. Grove, C.M.G., D.S.O., G.S.O.1, P. Hudson, D.S.O., late A.A. and Q.M.G., G. Goldney, C.M.G., D.S.O., late C.R.E., and Colonel H. W. Grattan, C.M.G., D.S.O., late A.D.M.S., whose untiring devotion to duty and ready resource have overcome all obstacles and rendered successful the planning of the many operations undertaken by the Division.

"Few of the original members of the 6th Division now remain with it, but I am sure that all those who, like myself, have been associated with the Division for any length of time, will always cherish proud and happy memories of the time spent with it.

"The 6th Division has never gone to a new command without a hearty welcome, nor left a command without an expression of thanks for services rendered and of regret that it was being transferred.

"I wish all ranks the best of luck in life, whatever fate may have for them in the future."

The Battalion had by the end of March been reduced to a mere Cadre, and on the 31st a warning order was received to the effect that the probable date of the departure of the Cadre for home was April 7th, but it was Thursday, 10th, when the Cadre actually embarked at Dunkirk and was struck off the strength of the British Army in France.

The Cadre proceeding to England was composed as under:—Captains J. Sheldon, D.S.O., M.C., and A. L. Gill, M.C.; Lieutenant A. G. Bowring;

* Sherwood Foresters.

Digitized by Google

Second-Lieutenants J. K. L. Roberts and H. F. Hill; Regimental Sergeant-Major A. Cockayne; Regimental Quartermaster-Sergeant Noble; Company Sergeant-Majors G. Cowern, W. Toole and G. Oakes; Company Quartermaster-Sergeants G. Armstrong and Penn; Sergeant-Drummer T. Haw; Sergeants A. Adams, W. Spick, S. Wilson and C. Voce; Lance-Sergeant W. Brown; Corporals A. E. Cornish, G. Cuckson, A. Jacobs, H. Lowe, J. McLoughlin, T. Pridmore and Savage; Lance-Corporals Clay, C. Edward, A. Packer and W. Phipps; Drummers F. Bandy, M. Cannings, W. Christie, A. Cotterill, K. Crosby, J. Jepson, A. Green, W. Love, F. Machon, D. McCullock, H. Riley, P. Roberts and A. Webb; Privates G. Abram, H. Bryant, J. Crossland, A. Devereux, W. Eagle, H. Eagley, G. Fearn, H. Glover, E. Handley, T. Haines, W. Hart, T. Hayes, A. Hopkins, W. Johnson, P. Joyce, J. Kirkman, W. Lawson, E. Lee, A. Oldershaw, A. Paget, F. Repton, A. Sharpe, J. Smyth, A. Williams and G. Wright.

The following account of the reception of the Cadre in Derby is taken from the *Derby Telegraph*:—

"BACK TO BLIGHTY.

"DERBY'S WELCOME TO THE 2nd SHERWOOD FORESTERS.

"MARCH THROUGH CHEERING CROWDS.

"CIVIC RECEPTION IN THE MARKET SQUARE.

"Cheers loud and long greeted the arrival of the Cadre of the 2nd Battalion Notts and Derbyshire Regiment (Sherwood Foresters) on arrival in Derby on Thursday evening. This small force of five officers and 65 men are the first of the 'Old Contemptibles' to come back home to Derby, the Battalion having fought right through the long years of war. The reception was a remarkable one; its spontaneity added to its charm, for the public of Derby had only been able to learn through the same evening's papers that the Cadre was due to arrive at the Midland Railway Station an hour or two later—at eight minutes past seven to be precise. It was unfortunate that the military authorities were unable to give an earlier notification, but circumstances prevented it. In fact, it was understood that the men only came across from Dunkirk the same morning, and consequently the exact time of their reaching Derby could not be known until Dover had been left behind. As a consequence there was a natural shortage of decorations. There were, however, a few flags here and there in the streets. It was, however, the people's welcome that mattered, and this was beyond any question. It was sincere, and it was voiced with a warmth that must have been very cheering to these men, more accustomed as they are to the sound of battle than to a town's peace welcome.

"The train arrived punctually, and the Mayor and Mayoress (Alderman and Mrs. Robotham), Major Mortimore (the officer commanding the depot, Normanton Barracks), Lieutenant McIntosh (adjutant), and local public men, with the Chief Constable (Captain H. M. Haywood) had gathered to give the soldiers a welcome on behalf of the town. A large crowd had gathered, and here a little colour was to be seen, many of the children carrying flags and waving them enthusiastically. A great cheer was raised by the crowd as the men emerged from the station, and the delight of the children and the heartiness

Digitized by Google

of their welcome were very noticeable. Little time was lost here. A brief welcome by the Mayor, whose motor-car was beflagged, and a procession to the Market-place was promptly marshalled. The way was led by the band of the Derby Branch of the Discharged and Demobilized Soldiers' and Sailors' Federation, followed by the band of the Foresters from Normanton Barracks, then came the men with Captain Sheldon in charge, and the members of the Discharged and Demobilized Soldiers' and Sailors' Federation, between 200 and 300 strong, brought up the rear of the procession.

"Along the Midland Road, London Road, St. Peter's Street, and the Corn Market the procession passed through cheering crowds, until the Market-place was reached. Here there was a large crowd. A small platform had been erected just in front of the Food Offices. The returned heroes were drawn up in front of this, and on it there were the Mayor and Mayoress with Miss Robotham, Major Mortimore, Alderman Hill, J.P., and Councillor James Potter being amongst others present.

"The cheering having subsided, the Mayor, addressing the returned officers and men, said: 'This is indeed a proud and happy day for you, and also for us, the citizens of Derby. As Mayor of this Borough, it gives me the greatest possible pleasure to welcome you home. Other Mayors, my predecessors during the past four years, have had the duty and the privilege of seeing you and others off to the front, but upon me has devolved the great pleasure of welcoming you back home. We are proud to know that you went out at the very commencement of this awful war. You are an infinitesimally small portion of that so-called Contemptible Army which the Kaiser thought to deride. But during the four and a half years of warfare you have always done your duty. You have passed through hardships and suffering. Very many of your comrades have made the supreme sacrifice of laying down their lives, and others have been wounded and maimed for life. You, thank God, have come home to-day. For all the heroism that you and your comrades have shown during these four and a half years of war the citizens of Derby, through me, their Mayor, gratefully thank you. We are conscious of the fact that if you had not voluntarily gone out to do your duty there would have been no Derby for you to come back to. We remember how, only a year ago to-day, that order of that great General, Sir Douglas Haig, struck alarm throughout this land when he told you you had to put your backs to the wall; that you were not to retire. You were inspired by those words; you knew that you were fighting for freedom, for right, and duty. And now, thank God, what a change! Twelve months only have rolled by, and the Kaiser and his men, where are they to-day? They are humbled in the dust; they have reaped the fruit of their despicable and dishonourable conduct. They are a broken and defeated foe. They have learnt that "Britons never shall be slaves," and we know to-day that freedom, right and justice have triumphed. I am aware that you have been travelling, leaving Dunkirk, and only a few hours ago came across the sea, and that you are anxious to get to your barracks, where you will have a hearty reception and a good feed. I thank each one of you for having done your duty, for having displayed that heroism and that chivalry which Englishmen will ever display, and on behalf of the town I tender to you, their heroes, very grateful thanks.'

Digitized by Google

"The Mayor then called for three cheers for the 2nd Battalion Sherwood Foresters, and these were vociferously given.

"Captain Sheldon was called up to the platform to reply. He did so in few words. 'I thank you very much for the welcome given us to-day; and that is all there is to say about it. Thanks very much.' The crowd heartily cheered this soldierly speech, and the playing of the National Anthem closed the public welcome. The men then marched away to Normanton Barracks. The other officers with the men were Captain Gill, Second-Lieutenant Hill, and Lieutenant Bowring and Second-Lieutenant Roberts in charge of the Colours."

The Great War was over, and some of those of the 2nd Battalion who fought in it had come home again.

Digitized by Google

APPENDICES

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

I.

BATTLE HONOURS

The Great War.

The following two lists represent the "Honours" gained by the Regiment, the shorter list containing the names for the Colours, the other those earned by the several battalions of the Regiment.

THE SHERWOOD FORESTERS (NOTTINGHAMSHIRE AND DERBYSHIRE REGIMENT)

THE GREAT WAR—30 BATTALIONS.

List I.

Aisne, 1914, '18.
Neuve Chapelle.
Loos.
Somme, 1916, '18.
Ypres, 1917, '18.
Cambrai, 1917, '18.
St. Quentin Canal.
France and Flanders, 1914-18.
Italy, 1917-18.
Gallipoli, 1915.

List II.

Armentières, 1914.
Aubers.
Hooge, 1915.
Albert, 1916, '18.
Delville Wood.
Ginchy.
Flers-Courcelette.
Morval.
Thiepval.
Le Transloy.
Ancre Heights.
Ancre, 1916.
Arras, 1917, '18.
Vimy, 1917.
Scarpe, 1917, '18.
Messines, 1917.
Pilckem.
Langemarck, 1917.
Menin Road.
Polygon Wood.
Broodseinde.
Poelcappelle.
Passchendaele.
St. Quentin.
Bapaume, 1918.
Rosières.
Villers Bretonneux.
Lys.
Bailleul.
Kemmel.
Scherpenberg.
Drocourt-Quéant.
Hindenburg Line.
Épéhy.
Canal du Nord.
Beaurevoir.
Courtrai.
Selle.
Sambre.
Piave.
Suvla.
Landing at Suvla.
Scimitar Hill.
Egypt, 1916.

Digitized by Google

II.

HONOURS AND REWARDS

Victoria Cross, Orders of the Bath, St. Michael and St. George, British Empire Orders, Distinguished Service Orders, Military Crosses, Promotions, Mentioned in Despatches, and Foreign Awards.

The ranks of officers on the strength of the 1st and 2nd Battalions in August, 1914, are shown as in the Army List for that month.

Dates against Honours and Rewards are in all cases those of the *London Gazette*. "D" denotes Mention in Despatches.

Note.—This list is as accurate as possible from data available. Omissions or errors may have occurred. It is hoped that notification of same will be sent to the publishers with a view to corrections being made should a second impression become necessary.

VICTORIA CROSSES.

RIVERS, JACOB; Private (Regtl. No. 6016); 1st Battalion. For gallantry in France, Extract from *London Gazette*, 28/4/15, states:—"For most conspicuous bravery at Neuve Chapelle on March 12th, 1915, when he, on his own initiative, crept to within a few yards of a very large number of the enemy who were massed on the flank of an advanced company of his battalion, and hurled bombs on them. His action caused the enemy to retire, and so relieved the situation.

"Private Rivers performed a second act of great bravery on the same day. similar to the first-mentioned, again causing the enemy to retire. He was killed on this occasion."

Cross presented to his Mother 29/11/16.

UPTON, JAMES; Corporal (Regtl. No. 10082); 1st Battalion. For gallantry in France. Extract from *London Gazette*, 29/6/15, states:—"For most conspicuous bravery near Rouges Bancs on May 9th, 1915.

"During the whole of this day Corporal Upton displayed the greatest courage in rescuing the wounded whilst exposed to very heavy rifle and artillery fire, going close to the enemy's parapet regardless of his own personal safety. One wounded man was killed by a shell whilst this non-commissioned officer was carrying him.

"When Corporal Upton was not actually carrying in the wounded he was engaged in bandaging and dressing the serious cases in front of our own parapet, exposed to the enemy's fire."

Cross presented by H.M. The King at Windsor Castle, 24/7/15.

Digitized by Google

ORDERS OF THE BATH, ST. MICHAEL AND ST. GEORGE, DISTINGUISHED SERVICE ORDERS, MILITARY CROSSES, AND PROMOTIONS.

NAME.	RANK.	HONOURS AND REWARDS.
Ambler, Charles	2/Lieut.	D., 25/7/17.
Bampton, Leonard Stanley ...	T./Lieut.	M.C., 8/3/19.
Becke, John Harold Whitworth	Capt. and Bt.-Major ...	D.S.O., 1/1/17; C.M.G., Bt.-Lieut.-Col., 1/1/18; D., 17/2/15, 1/1/16, 4/1/17, 15/5/17, 11/2/18, 20/5/18; French Croix de Chevalier, Légion d'Honneur, 24/6/16; French Légion d'Honneur (Officier), 17/12/17; French Croix de Guerre, 18/4/18.
Beedham, Nathaniel Harry ...	T./Lieut. (A./Capt.)	M.C., 4/2/18.
Bell, John Henry	2/Lieut.	M.C., 16/9/18.
Bell, Oscar Leslie	2/Lieut.	M.C., 8/3/19.
Benford, Louis	Lieut.	D., 24/5/18.
Bennett, Frank Edwin ...	Lieut.	M.C., 8/3/19.
Bion, Kenneth Norman ...	Lieut.	M.C., 14/1/16; D., 1/1/16; 21/12/17.
Bowmer, Wilfrid Henry ...	2/Lieut. (T./Capt.)	M.C., 26/9/17.
Boyd, William Audas ...	2/Lieut.	M.C., 26/7/18.
Bradshaw, Frederick Ewart	Lieut.-Col. (R. of O.) ...	D.S.O., 1/1/17; D., 4/1/17, 21/12/17.
Brownrigg, Wellesley Douglas Studholme	Capt.	D.S.O., 22/12/16; Bt.-Major, 2/2/16; Lieut.-Col., 7/2/18; D., 28/1/16, 13/7/16, 19/10/16, 15/8/17, 12/3/18, 27/8/18; Russian Order of St. Vladimir, 4th Class, with Swords, 15/5/17.
Burnett-Hitchcock, Basil Ferguson	Capt.	D.S.O., 9/12/14; C.B., 1/1/18; Bt. Major, 18/2/15; Lieut.-Col., 3/6/16; Col., 1/1/17; Maj.-Gen., 9/6/19; D., 19/10/14, 9/12/14, 17/2/15, 1/1/16, 15/6/16, 4/1/17, 15/5/17, 12/2/18; French Croix de Chevalier, Légion d'Honneur, 3/11/14; Serbian Order of White Eagle, 4th Class, with Swords, 10/9/18; Italian Officer of St. Maurice and St. Lazarus, 1/4/19; French Croix de Guerre, 9/4/20.
Burrows, Percival Ernest ...	Lieut.	M.C., 1/1/17.
Campbell, Donald William Auchinreck (S. Staff. R.)	A./Capt.	D., 17/2/15.
Carter, Herbert	2/Lieut.	D., 1/1/16.
Cashmore, Luke	2/Lieut.	M.C., 8/3/19.
Castle, Stanley Mason ...	Capt.	D., 29/5/17.
Chambers, Charles Robert, D.C.M.	Lieut. (T./Capt.)	M.C., 14/1/16; D., 1/1/16.
Chidlaw-Roberts, John Rhinallt	Lieut. (T./Capt.)	M.C., 17/4/17; bar, 17/9/17.
Clarke, Harry Castle ...	T./Lieut.	M.C., 1/2/19.
Collin, Edgar Nelson Turner	Capt.	D., 1/1/16.
Coman, Frederick Alfred William	Lieut. and Qr.Mr.	M.C., 14/1/16; D., 1/1/16.
Cooper, Sydney	T./Lieut. (A./Capt.)	M.C., 26/7/18.
Cowen, William John ...	2/Lieut.	M.C., 1/2/19; bar, 8/3/19.
Cowgill, John Ignatius William	Lieut. (A./Capt.)	M.C., 1/1/18.
Crellin, Arthur Murray ...	2/Lieut.	M.C., 14/11/16.
Crellin, William Anderson Watson	2/Lieut. (A./Lieut.-Col.) ...	D.S.O., 4/6/17; bar, 26/7/18; D., 25/7/17, 21/12/17, 28/12/18.
Crofton-Atkins, Cyril Randell	Lieut.-Col.	C.B.E., 3/6/19.
Crosby, Reginald Douglas (Linc. R.)	Lieut. (T./Capt.)	M.C., 6/9/15; D., 1/1/16.
Cuckow, Phillip Edwin ...	Capt.	O.B.E., 3/6/19; D., 24/5/18, 9/7/19.
Dammers, Robert William ...	Lieut.	D., 17/2/15.

Digitized by Google

NAME.	RANK.	HONOURS AND REWARDS.
Dixon, Hubert Bradshaw ...	Capt.	D., 22/6/15.
Dobbie, George Staple ...	Lieut.	M.C., 28/4/15; D., 22/6/15.
Douglas, James Hyde Moriarty	Lieut.	M.C., 8/3/19.
Dumbell, Charles Harold ...	Capt.	D.S.O., 1/1/17; bar, 26/7/18; second bar, 8/3/19; Bt.-Lieut.-Col., 3/6/19; D., 6/12/16, 24/5/18, 28/12/18, 9/7/19; French Croix de Guerre, 6/11/18.
Edwards, Aubyn Stanley ...	2/Lieut.	M.C., 6/9/15; bar, 16/8/17; D., 1/1/16, 21/7/17, 21/12/17, 30/5/18, 6/1/19; Italian Croce de Guerra, 17/5/19.
Edwards, John (R.W. Fus.)	T./Major	D.S.O., 8/3/19.
Edwards, William Ace ...	2/Lieut.	D.S.O., 4/2/18; D., 24/5/18, 6/1/19.
Elliott, William John Russell	2/Lieut.	M.C., 26/9/17.
Fielding, Frank William ...	2/Lieut.	M.C., 4/2/18.
Foster, Ronald Thomas ...	Capt.	D.S.O., 1/1/17; D., 1/1/16, 4/1/17, 20/5/18.
Gerrard, Abraham Francis (S. Lancs R., T.F.)	2/Lieut.	M.C., 2/12/18.
Gibbons, James FitzGeorge	2/Lieut.	M.C., 14/11/16.
Giles, Arthur Harry Ashfield	T./Lieut. (A./Capt.)	M.C., 4/2/18; D.S.O., 16/9/18; D., 28/12/18.
Giles, Alan Stewart	T./Lieut.	M.C., 26/9/17.
Gill, Arthur Leslie	2/Lieut.	M.C., 16/9/18.
Glover, Guy de Courcy (S. Staff. R.)	Capt.	D., 17/2/15.
Gleave, Harold Mason ...	Lieut.	D., 1/1/16.
Greaves, Harry	—	M.C., 16/9/18; bar, 2/12/18; second bar, 11/1/19; D.S.O., 8/3/19; D., 9/7/19.
Green, William Leslie ...	2/Lieut.	M.C., 26/7/18.
Greensmith, Wilfrid	2/Lieut.	M.C., 1/1/18.
Hancock, George Augustus ...	Lieut. (A./Capt.)	M.C., 3/6/19.
Hands, William Eric ...	2/Lieut.	M.C., 17/4/17.
Hart, Reginald Seton ...	Capt.	D.S.O., 27/10/17; bar, 8/3/19; Bt.-Lieut.-Col., 3/6/19; D., 21/12/17, 6/1/19, 8/7/19; Egyptian Order of the Nile, 4th Class.
Harvey, Charles Darley ...	Capt.	D.S.O., 1/1/18; D., 4/1/17, 21/12/17.
Herbert, Phillip Lee William	Capt.	C.B.E., 3/6/19; C.M.G., Bt.-Major, 1/1/17; D., 4/1/17, 22/1/19, 5/6/19; Egyptian Order of the Nile, 3rd Class; Russian Order of St. Anne, 3rd Class with Swords, 15/2/17; Order of St. Saviour, 2nd Class.
Hobbs, Charles James Willoughby	Capt.	D.S.O., 14/1/16; D., 17/2/15, 1/1/16, 4/1/17.
Hume, Hugh Bliss Torriano	Capt.	M.B.E., 3/6/19.
Hurndall, Maurice James (Notts Yeo.)	2/Lieut.	M.C., 8/3/19.
Jackson, George Christopher Mathew	2/Lieut.	D., 21/12/17.
Jones, Frank Evan	2/Lieut.	M.C., 25/11/16; D., 25/5/17, 20/5/18.
Kaine, Alexander James ...	T./Lieut.	M.C., 14/11/16.
Kennedy, Charles Seccombe Craufurd	2/Lieut.	M.C., 14/1/16; D., 22/6/15, 1/1/16.
Kent, Arthur	2/Lieut.	M.C., 15/10/18.
Lang, James Arthur Maule ...	Lieut.	O.B.E., 1/1/19.
Leveson-Gower, Phillip ...	Major	D.S.O., 1/1/17; C.M.G., 1/1/18; Bt.-Lieut.-Col., 18/2/15; Bt.-Col., 1/1/19; D., 17/2/15, 4/1/17, 15/5/17, 11/12/17; Belgian Croix de Guerre, 12/7/18.

Digitized by Google

NAME.	RANK.	HONOURS AND REWARDS.
Lightfoot, Arthur Cecil ...	2/Lieut. (T./Capt.)	M.C., 26/9/17.
MacBean, Ian Gordon ...	2/Lieut.	M.C., 3/6/18; Bt.-Major, 3/6/19; D., 5/6/19; French Croix de Guerre, 26/11/19; Serbian White Eagle, 5th Class, 7/6/19.
March, George Frederick ...	Lieut.	M.C., 1/1/17.
Marshall, William Raine ...	Lieut.-Col. (Bt.-Col.) ...	C.B., 26/6/16; K.C.B., 17/3/17; K.C.S.I., 24/4/18; G.C.M.G., 9/6/19; Major-Gen., 23/6/15; Lieut.-Gen., 3/3/19; D., 17/2/15, 5/8/15, 20/9/15, 28/1/16, 13/7/16, 10/7/17, 15/8/17, 12/3/18; Serbian White Eagle, 2nd Class, 15/2/17; French Légion d'Honneur, Croix de Commandeur, 31/8/17; Chinese Order of Wen-Hu, 1st Class, 17/2/20.
Mathias, James Herbert ...	Capt.	O.B.E., 7/6/18.
Maurice, Frederick Barton ...	Major (Bt.-Lieut. Col.) ...	C.B., 18/2/15; K.C.M.G., 1/1/18; Bt.-Col., 23/6/15; Major-Gen., 3/6/16; D., 9/12/14, 17/2/15, 22/6/15, 1/1/16, 12/2/18; French Légion d'Honneur, Croix de Commandeur, 15/4/16; French Croix de Guerre, 21/4/17; Russian Order of St. Stanislas, 1st Class, 1/6/17; Belgian Order of the Crown, 2nd Class.
Maxwell, John Egerton Harrison	Lieut.	M.C., 27/7/18; D., 7/3/18.
Menzies, John Ferguson ...	Capt.	M.C., 1/1/17.
Miller, Austin Timaeus ...	Capt.	M.C., 3/7/15; bar, 4/2/18; Bt. Major, 1/1/18; D., 3/7/15, 1/1/16, 4/1/17, 11/12/17; French Croix de Guerre, 17/12/17.
Millis, Charles Howard Goulden	Lieut.	M.C., 1/1/17; bar, 26/9/17; D.S.O., 24/9/18; Bt.-Major on promotion to Capt., 1/1/19; D., 20/12/18; French Croix de Guerre, 7/1/19.
Milward, Herbert Milward ...	Capt.	D.S.O., 1/1/17; bar, 1/1/18; Bt. Lieut.-Col., 1/1/19; D., 4/1/17, 21/12/17, 24/5/18, 28/12/18; French Légion d'Honneur (Chevalier), 29/1/19.
Mitchell, John Douglas (22nd D.L.I.)	T./Major (A./Lieut.-Col.) ...	D.S.O., 26/7/18; C.M.G., 12/12/19; D., 28/12/18, 9/7/19; Belgian Croix de Guerre, 26/11/19.
Mollan, Francis Robert Henry (R.A.M.C.)	Capt.	M.C., 3/6/18.
Moore, Robert Frank ...	2/Lieut. (A./Capt.)	M.C., 4/6/17; D.S.O., 26/7/18; D., 28/12/18.
Morley, Lionel St. Heliers ...	Major	D.S.O., 14/1/16; D., 22/6/15, 1/1/16.
Mortimore, Charles Reynolds	Major	D.S.O., 23/6/15; D., 22/6/15.
Mudge, James Billing ...	Capt.	M.C., 4/2/18.
Nicholson, Randolph Renwick (E. York R., T.F.)	2/Lieut.	M.C., 16/9/18.
Palmer, Roger	2/Lieut.	D., 1/1/16.
Pearse, Reginald Guy ...	2/Lieut. (T./Capt.)	M.C., 26/9/17; D.S.O., 8/3/19; D., 9/7/19.
Peck, Leslie Wayland ...	2/Lieut.	D., 22/6/15.
Phelps, Malet Peyton ...	Major	D., 28/1/16.
Popham, Robert Stewart, D.S.O.	Capt.	C.M.G., 3/6/19; Bt.-Lieut.-Col., 2/6/18; D., 15/6/16, 15/5/17, 20/5/18, 5/6/19; Serbian White Eagle, 4th Class, 7/6/19.

Digitized by Google

NAME.	RANK.	HONOURS AND REWARDS.
Puxon, Ernest Francis Mortimer (Notts Yeo.)	Capt.	M.C., 3/6/19.
Rose, Thomas	Lieut.	M.C., 26/7/18.
Royce, George Noel	Lieut.	M.C., 1/1/19; Bt.-Major on promotion to Capt., 3/6/19; D., 1/7/19.
Sharpe, Frank	2/Lieut.	D., 15/6/16.
Sheldon, Joseph	2/Lieut.	M.C., 26/7/18; bar, 8/3/19; D.S.O., 8/3/19; D., 9/7/19.
Sherbrooke, Robert Lowe ...	Lieut.	Bt.-Major, 3/6/16; D.S.O., 26/9/17; D., 1/1/16; 15/6/16, 4/1/17, 21/12/17.
Slater, Harry Andrew ...	Lieut.	D.S.O., 16/9/18; D., 28/12/18.
Smith, Harry Leonard Chappell	2/Lieut.	D., 17/2/15.
Smith-Dorrien, Sir Horace Lockwood, G.C.B., D.S.O.	General	G.C.M.G., 23/6/15; French Légion d'Honneur, Grand Officier, 15/5/15; D., 9/9/14; 19/10/14.
Stranger, Richard Henry ...	Lieut. and Adjt.	D., 22/6/15.
Street, Edmund Rochfort ...	Capt.	D.S.O., 3/7/15; D., 1/1/16.
Sullivan-Tailyour, Eric Eyre	Lieut. (A./Capt.)	M.C., 3/6/18; D., 11/12/17.
Taylor, Garth Smithes ...	Lieut.	D., 4/1/17.
Taylor, Robert James Frederick	Major	C.B.E., 12/12/19; D., 17/2/15.
Tombazis, James Lyell ...	2/Lieut.	M.C.,15/10/18; D.S.O., 8/3/19; D., 9/7/19.
Tomlinson, Frederick ...	Major	M.C., 23/6/15; O.B.E., 12/12/19; D., 22/6/15, 25/5/17, 21/12/17.
Tower, Robert Beauchamp ...	Lieut.	M.C., 1/1/17; D., 1/1/16, 11/12/17, 5/6/19, 3/3/20; Russian Order of St. Stanislas, 2nd Class, with Swords, 16/7/21; Russian Order of St. Anne, 2nd Class, with Swords, 16/7/21.
Trohear, Thomas	2/Lieut.	M.C., 4/2/18.
Vann, Bernard William ...	Lieut. (T./Capt.)	French Croix de Guerre, 1/5/17.
Varney, Leslie Charles ...	2/Lieut.	D., 9/7/19.
Walker, Niel Alexander McDonald	Lieut.	Italian Silver Medal for Military Valour, 26/5/17.
Walsh, G. P.	Lieut.	D., 1/1/16.
Way, Bromley George Vere, M.V.O.	Capt.	Bt.-Lieut.-Col., 1/1/18; C.B.E., 3/6/19; French Légion d'Honneur, Croix d'Officier, 10/10/18; Belgian Order of the Crown, 7/6/19; Belgian Croix de Guerre, 7/2/21.
Wayte, Adrian Barclay ...	Capt.	D.S.O., 1/1/18; D., 21/12/17.
Webb, Martyn Brooke ...	Capt.	D., 6/1/19; Egyptian Order of the Nile, 4th Class, 16/1/20.
Webster, John Ryie ...	Capt.	M.C., 25/8/16; D.S.O., 26/11/17; D., 15/6/16; 21/12/17.
Weston, William	Lieut.	M.C., 18/10/17; bar, 26/7/18.
Whicher, James D'Arcy ...	2/Lieut.	D., 15/2/15.
Wildbore, Horace George ...	2/Lieut.	M.C., 17/9/17.
Wilkinson, John Shann ...	Lieut.	M.C., 1/2/17; D.S.O., 27/7/18; Bt.-Lieut.-Col. on promotion to Major, 29/11/20; D., 20/10/20, 20/11/20.
Willcox, Henry Beresford Dennitts	2/Lieut.	M.C. 18/2/15; D.S.O., 1/1/18; D., 17/2/15, 4/1/17, 15/5/17, 11/12/17, 22/1/19.
Willison, Arthur Cecil ...	Lieut.	M.C., 11/5/17; bar, 1/1/18; D.S.O., 8/3/19; D., 21/12/17, 9/7/19.
Wilmot, Herbert Coningsby	Capt.	D., 21/12/17.
Wylie, John Price	Lieut.	D.S.O., 17/4/17; D., 25/5/17.
Wyncoll, Hugh Edmond Fowler	Lieut.	M.C., 22/9/16; O.B.E., 3/6/19.
Young, Reginald Bradley ...	Lieut.	Bt. Major, 3/6/19.

Digitized by Google

DISTINGUISHED CONDUCT MEDALS.

NO.	RANK AND NAME.	BATTALION.	"LONDON GAZETTE."
10057	Sgt. C. Armstrong	2nd ...	17/4/17
21826	Pte. A. Ault ...	1st ...	3/6/16
11214	Cpl. A. A. Balaam	1st ...	3/6/15
6745	Sgt. H. V. Barnes	2nd ...	1/4/15
11919	Dmr. C. Bentley ...	2nd ...	15/9/15
71286	Pte. H. Beresford	2nd ...	12/3/19
9189	Pte. R. Biggins ...	2nd ...	15/9/15
5975	C.S.M. A. R. Blanchard	1st ...	22/9/16
13960	Sgt. C. Bowler ...	2nd ...	3/10/18
7055	Cpl. F. Bowler ...	2nd ...	30/6/15
18691	L./Cpl. A. Brierly	2nd ...	12/3/19
6806	C.S.M. A. Briggs ...	2nd ...	1/1/17
70729	Pte. E. Brown ...	1st ...	22/10/17
9041	Pte. L. T. Butler	2nd ...	14/1/16
13791	Pte. B. Caunt ...	1st ...	11/5/17
6070	Sgt. W. Chart ...	1st ...	30/6/15
11263	Sgt. R. Coote ...	1st ...	3/6/18
19795	Cpl. M. Coverly ...	1st ...	22/10/17
26939	Sgt. J. B. Cox ...	1st ...	18/2/19
9188	A./S.M. T. Cumming;	att. 2/6th Bn. (T.F.)	24/1/17
10326	Sgt. C. H. Dady ...	1st ...	3/6/15
11588	Pte. J. S. Draycott	1st ...	3/6/15
6703	Sgt. E. Elshaw ...	2nd ...	14/1/16
97356	L./Cpl. H. K. Evans	2nd ...	12/3/19
11118	Sgt. J. Fearn ...	1st ...	26/9/16
300037	Pte. J. T. Fleet	1st ...	12/3/19
10390	Sgt. A. France ...	1st ...	22/9/16
11104	Sgt. T. S. Giles ...	1st ...	14/1/16
11371	Sgt. H. Godbold ...	1st ...	22/10/17
43740	Sgt. S. Hague ...	1st ...	12/3/19
265341	Pte. A. H. Hall ...	2nd ...	12/3/19
21771	L./Cpl. W. Hallam	1st ...	22/10/17
3865	L./Cpl. W. Hands	1st ...	22/10/17
9687	Pte. J. H. Harvey	1st ...	12/12/17
10253	Pte. J. Hayes ...	1st ...	3/6/15
11711	Sgt. N. Hinnett ...	1st ...	22/1/16
		Bar	24/6/16
11441	Sgt. C. T. Howarth	2nd ...	30/6/15
11611	Sgt. G. W. Hunt	1st ...	1/1/18
8738	Pte. A. Jackson ...	1st ...	3/6/15
9594	Pte. J. Jones ...	2nd ...	15/9/15
6269	Sgt. G. Kidman ...	2nd ...	15/9/15
307192	Pte. W. J. H. Latchford	2nd ...	12/3/19
18659	Sgt. T. Lee ...	1st ...	22/10/17
27737	Sgt. G. Lewis ...	1st ...	30/10/18
55786	C.S.M. W. Lockley	1st ...	15/11/18
	Bar		12/3/19
90014	Sgt. G. A. Lummus	2nd ...	12/3/19
10588	Sgt. T. Mallett ...	1st ...	4/6/17
265006	C.S.M. A. Mann	1st ...	3/6/19
5360	C.S.M. C. Martin	1st ...	4/3/18
10541	Sgt. J. W. J. Millar	1st ...	1/4/15
9439	C.S.M. F. Mortimer	att. 1/7th Bn. (T.F.)	3/6/16
10689	L./Cpl. H. Neal ...	1st ...	30/6/15
72895	Pte. R. L. Ottaway	2nd ...	3/9/18
5684	Cpl. E. Paul ...	2nd ...	30/6/15
8371	Pte. J. Penn ...	1st ...	1/4/15
9308	R.S.M. S. Poston	2nd ...	14/1/16
10302	Sgt. G. Powditch	2nd ...	3/9/18
11743	Pte. C. Ray ...	2nd ...	15/9/15
23145	Cpl. E. Rhodes ...	2nd ...	4/3/18
11686	Sgt. D. Rolfe ...	1st ...	22/10/17
8570	Q.M.S. A. R. Rowe	2nd ...	16/1/15
12276	Cpl. W. Russon ...	1st ...	3/9/18
8584	Pte. J. Savage ...	2nd ...	5/8/15
9007	Sgt. A. Scrimshaw	1st ...	3/6/15
71655	L./Cpl. J. E. Seagrave	2nd ...	3/9/18
11095	Sgt. J. H. Shelton	1st ...	22/10/17
9652	Sgt. J. Shortland	1st ...	3/6/15
10655	C.Q.M.S. H. Slater	1st ...	3/6/19
3783	Sgt. W. B. Smith	1st ...	16/1/19
	(bar)		12/3/19
63853	Sgt. J. W. Solari	2nd ...	1/1/18
11073	Sgt. W. Spick ...	2nd ...	3/9/18
9450	Sgt. J. Swift ...	1st ...	14/1/16
9224	Sgt. H. Underwood	2nd ...	3/9/18
16301	Sgt. H. Uttley ...	2nd ...	17/4/17
6126	C.S.M. J. A. Ward	2nd ...	14/1/16
10831	L./Cpl. C. Warmer	1st ...	30/6/15
11576	Sgt. W. Weston ...	2nd ...	26/9/16
10990	Pte. E. Whittaker	1st ...	3/6/15
10646	C.Q.M.S. F. Widdowson	1st ...	30/6/15
10680	Sgt. G. Wilson ...	2nd ...	1/1/19

MILITARY MEDALS.

1ST BATTALION THE SHERWOOD FORESTERS.

NO.	RANK AND NAME.	
18717	Pte.	Adams, F.
15442	L./Cpl.	Anthony, A.
102665	Pte.	Baker, A. (bar).
267299	Cpl.	Balmer, M.
11753	Pte.	Barker, T.
11889	Pte.	Barker, T.
22837	Pte.	Barnes, J. J.
6486	Pte.	Beardsley, A.
15752	Pte.	Bennett, J.
7785	L./Cpl.	Bingham, W.
13871	Sgt.	Blazey, J.
18568	Pte.	Blythe, J.
23209	Pte.	Bowley, J.
97366	A./Cpl.	Bramwell, E.
14026	Pte.	Brown, T.
71164	Sgt.	Brownlow, E. C.
4938	Cpl.	Bullard, G. H.
18629	Pte.	Butcher, N.

Digitized by Google

MILITARY MEDALS (*continued*).

NO.	RANK	NAME.
17810	A./Sgt.	Cartledge, S.
13791	Pte.	Caunt, B.
11361	L./Sgt.	Chambers, F.
19801	Cpl.	Chambers, G.
10980	Pte.	Chandler, P. A. R.
28823	Pte.	Chapman, J.
18972	Pte.	Chilton, A.
78144	Sgt.	Clarke, F. C.
5810	Sgt.	Clarke, O.
10348	Cpl.	Coleman, E.
10968	Pte.	Concannon, A.
13426	Pte.	Darroll, W. H.
9241	Sgt.	Dilkes, E. W.
18681	Pte.	Dodsley, E.
269827	L./Cpl.	Dolby, G. H.
6511	A./Cpl.	Eaton, J. A.
102389	Pte.	Egan, T. J.
6945	Pte.	Ellis, E.
10345	Sgt.	Ferguson, G. A.
10436	Sgt.	Fitzjohn, W.
10973	Cpl.	Fletcher, E.
11014	Pte.	Freeman, W. (bar).
300024	Sgt.	Grand, A. J. A.
14247	Pte.	Gration, G. H.
67611	Pte.	Greenbury, W. P.
11132	A./Sgt.	Goddard, G. A.
25213	Pte.	Goncher, T.
26222	Sgt.	Gyte, A.
4762	Pte.	Harris, A.
12388	L./Cpl.	Harrison, K.
91075	Pte.	Henson, C. P. S.
11198	Cpl.	Hill, T. W.
11709	L./Sgt.	Hinkley, A. T.
235357	Pte.	Hocking, E. C.
102637	A./Cpl.	Hollingsworth, T. A.
266595	A./Sgt.	Hornby, J. (bar).
58692	L./Cpl.	Jarratt, A.
73399	Sgt.	Jarvis, T. K.
3633	Pte.	Jeffrey, W.
15231	Pte.	Jepson, C.
10998	Pte.	Kane, A. E.
9291	A./C.S.M.	Leivers, A. B.
67062	Sgt.	Lewis, G.
11540	Pte.	License, A.
19891	Pte.	Limb, F.
10720	Pte.	Lingard, A.
55786	C.S.M.	Lockley, W.
1038	Pte.	Marshall, A.
97392	Pte.	McDermott, H.
10453	L./Cpl.	McDonald, J. C.
22948	L./Cpl.	Meades, W.
27528	Pte.	Orme, W. H.
26139	Pte.	Peters, W. F.
8371	Pte.	Penn, J.
70785	Pte.	Pinchin, C.
26806	Pte.	Portas, H.
10820	Sgt.	Raine, R.
22471	L./Cpl.	Reynolds, W.
11044	Sgt.	Richards, G. W.
14840	Pte.	Roe, A. J.
4928	Cpl.	Roe, J. H.
80045	Pte.	Rushworth, G.
44365	Pte.	Russell, G.
12276	Sgt.	Russon, W.
103743	C.S.M.	Sales, E. (bar).
53418	Pte.	Sawyer, C.
9605	L./Cpl.	Simpson, A.
10392	Cpl.	Simpson, B.
10793	Pte.	Smallwood, F.
23025	Pte.	Smith, A.
33899	Pte.	Smith, H. (bar).
102865	Sgt.	Smith, P.
2783	Sgt.	Smith, W. B.
19955	Pte.	Spooner, W.
13674	Sgt.	Stapleton, C.
11431	Cpl.	Stratton, P.
10334	Pte.	Talbot, W.
11803	Sgt.	Taylor, H.
4767	Pte.	Thomas, T. J.
9951	Sgt.	Thompson, C. R.
72236	Sgt.	Tranter, E.
235534	Pte.	Uy, J. F. J.
4739	Pte.	Walker, A. C.
10831	A./C.S.M.	Warmer, C. A.
41461	Pte.	Waterhouse, C.
5047	Pte.	Watts, W.
6541	L./Cpl.	Williams, A. E.
53842	Pte.	Williamson, G.
15016	Pte.	Wilkins, A. E.
205387	Cpl.	Wolstencroft, A.
18596	Pte.	Woodward.
23513	Pte.	Wright, F. W.
20104	L./Cpl.	Wright, W. T.

2ND BATTALION THE SHERWOOD FORESTERS.

NO.	RANK	NAME.
11084	Sgt.	Askew, G.
43849	Pte.	Baker, L.
266947	Sgt.	Bannister, G.
6745	Sgt.	Barnes, H. V.
32499	L./Cpl.	Baxter, S.
71286	Pte.	Beresford, H.
9189	Pte.	Biggins, R.
70647	Pte.	Billingham, S.
6137	Pte.	Bloomfield, J.
12354	Pte.	Booth, J.
21064	Pte.	Boswell, J. W.
13960	Sgt.	Bowler, C.
7055	Cpl.	Bowler, F.
11240	Sgt.	Boyd, W. A.
73920	L./Cpl.	Bradley, E. W.
22084	L./Sgt.	Brakes, J.
3321	L./Cpl.	Briddon, A.
4737	Pte.	Clay, G.
70403	Pte.	Cook, D. G.
46078	Sgt.	Cooper, A. B.
25301	Pte.	Cresswell, H.
103756	Sgt.	Cross, G.
11554	C.S.M.	Cunningham, D.
11947	Pte.	Curtis, J. H.

Digitized by Google

MILITARY MEDALS (*continued*).

NO.	RANK	NAME
71095	L./Sgt.	Deakin, A.
9923	Cpl.	Dodge, H. (2 bars).
47893	Pte.	Drage, E.
17143	Pte.	Dunn, J. E.
86440	Pte.	Ellis, J.
11480	Sgt.	Else, E.
118029	Pte.	Emmett, J. H.
4445	Pte.	Etches, H.
3521	Pte.	Fallon, H. (bar).
3330	Pte.	Fallon, J.
56042	Pte.	Gibson, P.
72837	Pte.	Goodman, G. A.
20449	Pte.	Green, G.
309	Pte.	Grogan, E.
10405	Sgt.	Grundy, F.
70613	Pte.	Guest, R.
74013	Sgt.	Gurney, S.
9697	Pte.	Hallam, G.
73027	Pte.	Handley, E.
21568	Pte.	Harby, J.
9102	Sgt.	Harrison, J.
4259	Pte.	Hartshorn, J. H.
19699	Pte.	Haywood, J. T.
11268	Pte.	Heathcote, J.
25854	L./Cpl.	Hilton, J. C.
6258	Pte.	Hodgkinson, A.
10180	Pte.	Hodgkinson, A.
70618	Pte.	Hodgkinson, W.
74397	Pte.	Honour, H.
11859	Pte.	Hooker, A.
72717	Pte.	Hopkins, W. J.
15132	Pte.	Howley, E.
21407	L./Cpl.	Ives, J. (bar).
9250	Pte.	Jackson, G.
20268	Pte.	Jackson, G. H.
74014	Sgt.	James, D. O.
7321	Sgt.	Johnson, F.
7069	Pte.	Johnson, W. H.
4578	L./Cpl.	Jones, A.
6251	Pte.	Joynt, J.
72939	Pte.	Kewlay, E.
21054	L./Cpl.	Kirk, W.
4901	Sgt.	Knowles, J.
70932	L./Cpl.	Law, W.
11234	Sgt.	Laws, W. H.
45796	Pte.	Land, W.
10767	Sgt.	Lound, E. L.
4926	L./Cpl.	Loverseed, J.
27938	A./Sgt.	Marygold, E. J.
73923	Pte.	Miles, L. J.
6885	Pte.	Mortimer, E.
12108	Pte.	Mullins, T.
18799	Pte.	Newton, A.
6540	Pte.	Nunn, W. J.
10810	Sgt.	Oakes, G.
5156	Pte.	Pask, J.
12326	Pte.	Pearson, E.
11474	Pte.	Phipps, G. H.
267478	Sgt.	Pike, H.
10302	Sgt.	Powditch, G.
10751	Cpl.	Pownall, A.
63057	Pte.	Pritchard, R.
28702	Pte.	Radford, T.
3295	Sgt.	Ramsden, J.
13503	Sgt.	Revill, P.
67064	Sgt.	Rogers, G. T.
1496	Sgt.	Scott, G.
102197	Pte.	Seeley, R.
72729	Pte.	Selth, R. E.
12244	Pte.	Sharpe, P.
22688	Pte.	Simpson, H. H.
10293	Pte.	Simpson, W.
11366	Pte.	Slack, C.
25414	Pte.	Smith, A.
78945	Pte.	Smith, A. E.
31552	Pte.	Smith, J.
10114	L./Cpl.	Smith, J. H.
4464	Cpl.	Staples, J. J.
27836	L./Cpl.	Stevens, C. A.
28420	Pte.	Stevenson, P. C.
4525	Pte.	Stevenson, S. H.
72790	Pte.	Steward, H.
70687	Pte.	Storey, A. (bar).
11801	L./Cpl.	Stubbs, J.
36583	Pte.	Strouthers, E. J.
5171	L./Cpl.	Swales, J. W.
29944	Pte.	Swift, C.
3813	Pte.	Tandy, R.
10065	L./Cpl.	Thornley, H.
235096	Pte.	Todd, C.
24015	Pte.	Tougher, G.
9224	Sgt.	Underwood, H.
46885	Pte.	Vardy, G.
15414	Cpl.	Waite, W.
12004	Sgt.	Waldron, E. G.
13524	L./Cpl.	Ward, H. W.
73918	Pte.	Ward, L. W.
12555	Pte.	Watson, H. E.
10683	Sgt.	Wilson, G. J.
3752	Pte.	Worthington, T.
12088	Pte.	Wragg, H.

Digitized by Google

MERITORIOUS SERVICE MEDALS.

1ST BATTALION THE SHERWOOD FORESTERS.

NO.	RANK AND NAME.	
21420	Pte.	Bartram, J. C.
11361	L./Sgt.	Chambers, F.
10828	C.Q.M.S.	Fox, O.
4846	Cpl.	Freeman, W.
60441	A./Cpl.	Freeman, W. G.
8545	Cpl.	Hall, S.
11146	L./Cpl.	Last, J. W.
27737	Sgt.	Lewis, G.
7071	C.Q.M.S.	Mills, G.
23399	C.Q.M.S.	Pollard, W. H.
6780	C.S.M.	Pritchard, T.
17505	Sgt.	Savill, J. G.
10835	C.S.M.	Stevenson, A.
9119	C.S.M.	Stradling, J. E.

2ND BATTALION THE SHERWOOD FORESTERS.

10153	Sgt.	Battersby, C. H.
11459	L./Cpl.	Fawcett, W. E.
5171	Sgt.-Dmr.	Haw, R. J.
6954	C.Q.M.S.	Howarth, S. J.
9465	R.Q.M.S.	Noble, W.
10877	C.Q.M.S.	Penn, F.
6784	Cpl.	Pridmore, T.
18192	L./Cpl.	Shelton, J. W.
110732	Sgt.	Spick, W.
12144	Pte.	Swift, H.
9224	Sgt.	Underwood, H.

FOREIGN AWARDS

NO.	RANK AND NAME.	BATTALION.	AWARD.	"LONDON GAZETTE."
11889	Pte. T. Barker	1st	Montenegrin Medal for Merit (Silver)	9/3/17
13971	Sergt. J. Blazey	1st	French Médaille Militaire	14/7/17
103757	Cpl. T. Bowler	2nd	Belgian Croix de Guerre	
6806	A./R.S.M. A. Briggs	2nd	French Médaille d'Honneur avec Glaives (en vermeil)	29/1/19
11374	Pte. A. J. Coventry	2nd	Russian Medal of St. George, 4th Class	28/5/15
10938	Cpl. E. Davidson	2nd	Russian Cross of the Order of St. George, 4th Class	25/8/15
11588	Pte. J. S. Draycott	1st	Russian Cross of the Order of St. George, 4th Class	25/8/15
73916	Sergt. B. Gooch	2nd	French Croix de Guerre	6/11/18
14175	Cpl. F. Hardy	1st	French Croix de Guerre	24/2/16
72717	Pte. W. J. Hopkins	2nd	Russian Order of St. Anne, 3rd Class	15/2/17
			French Croix de Guerre avec palme	26/11/19
27737	Sergt. G. Lewis	1st	Belgian Croix de Guerre	12/7/18
5457	Pte. J. Morley	2nd	Russian Medal of St. George, 3rd Class	25/8/15
5933	C.S.M. T. W. Phillips	1st	Russian Medal of St. George, 1st Class	25/8/15
10820	Sergt. R. Raine	1st	Russian Cross of St. George, 1st Class	15/2/17
23145	Cpl. E. Rhodes	2nd	Belgian Croix de Guerre	12/7/18
9856	Sergt.-Dmr. J. Shipman	1st	French Médaille d'Honneur avec Glaives en argent	15/12/19
9652	Sergt. J. Shortland	1st	Russian Cross of the Order of St. George, 4th Class	25/8/15
6818	Sergt. J. Slater	1st	Belgian Croix de Guerre	

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

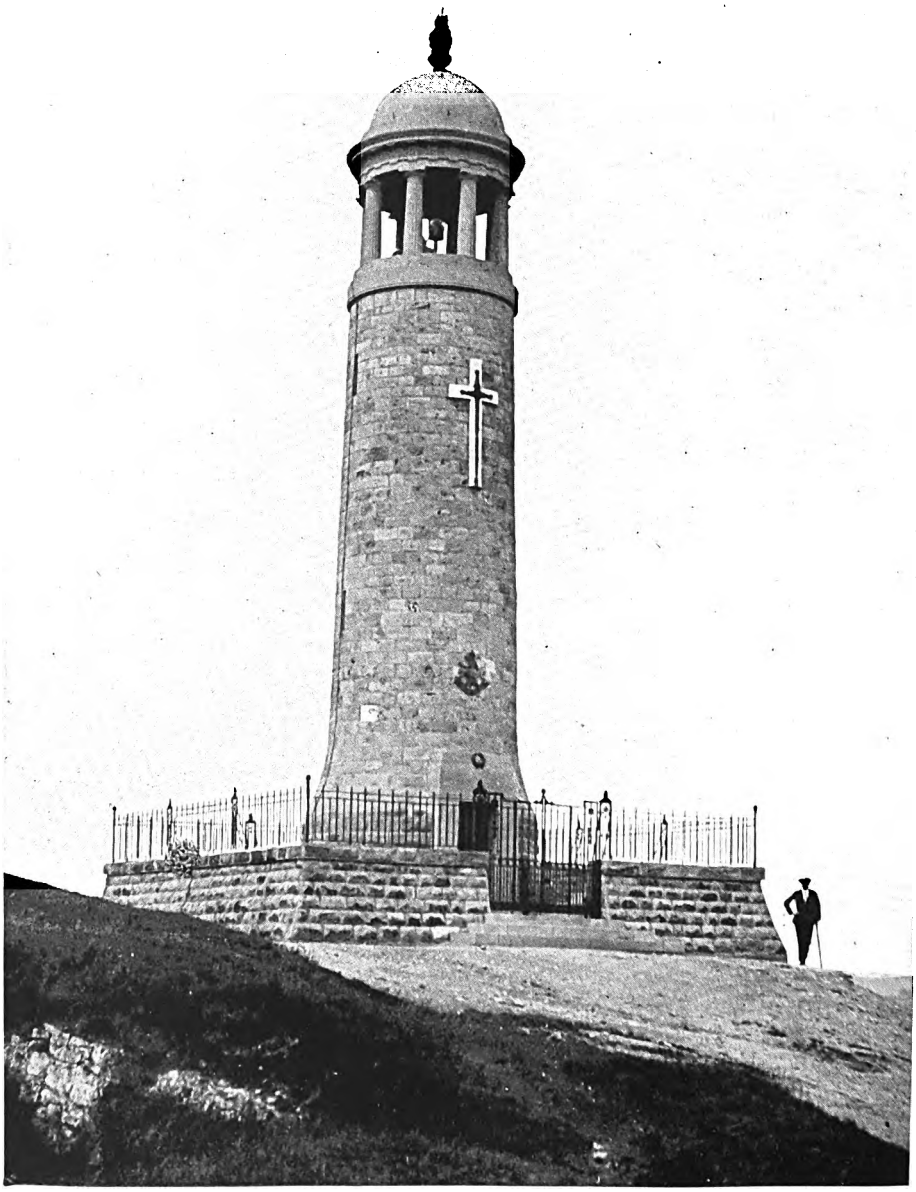


Photo.] *[Blount, Crich, Derbyshire.*

THE WAR MEMORIAL.

Digitized by Google

III.

OUR WAR MEMORIAL.

We take the following account of the opening of the Memorial Tower at Crich on August 6th from the *Derbyshire Advertiser* of August 10th :—

" It is doubtful whether, in the whole history of the picturesque village of Crich, so many people have congregated in the narrow streets as on Monday last. The opening of the Memorial Tower, erected at the summit of Crich Cliff to the memory of men of all ranks of The Sherwood Foresters (Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Regiment) who served their country during the Great War, attracted a host of people from all parts of the two counties.

" It would, in our opinion, be difficult to discover a more suitable site for such a memorial than the heights of Crich Cliff, standing, as it does, nearly 1,000 feet above sea level. The tower can be seen for many miles in almost every direction, and neither resident nor visitor in this part of the country can look upon it without giving a thought to the tremendous sacrifices it commemorates. It dominates the countryside and brings to mind the splendid example of men who bravely answered the call of duty and recked nothing of the consequences.

" The site was granted to the War Memorial Committee on the most generous terms by Major F. C. A. Hurt, of Alderwasley Hall, and the tower, which is by no means pretentious but rather charmingly simple in its design, has a majesty heightened by its commanding position. Overlooking the two counties whose gallant sons it commemorates, the tower is 64 feet high and is surmounted by a dome. The front of the tower, which faces towards Crich and the border of Nottinghamshire, bears a sword of sacrifice and, beneath, the badge of The Sherwood Foresters. The following inscription appears over the doorway :—

" ' To the memory of 11,409 men of all ranks of The Sherwood Foresters (Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Regiment) who gave their lives for their King and their Country in the Great War, 1914–1919, and in honour of 140,000 of their Comrades who served during the War in Thirty-two Battalions of the Regiment, this Monument is gratefully erected by the People of the Counties of Nottingham and Derby.'

" ' To remind us of their sacrifice and our duty.'

" The memorial has been erected at a cost of approximately £4,000, which has been raised by flag days, etc.

" Another part of the memorial is the provision for deposit in Nottingham and Derby of two suitable books of record in which are inscribed the names of all the fallen, while in each county town is to be placed a tablet referring to the memorial at Crich, and recording the number of men who made the great sacrifice.

The Opening Ceremony.

A SERVICE OF UNFORGETTABLE SOLEMNITY.

" The promoters of the scheme could not possibly have chosen a better day than August Bank Holiday on which to hold the opening ceremony. The holiday gave everyone a chance to attend, and the number who availed themselves of this opportunity was remarkably large. From well before lunch-time a continuous stream of motorists, cyclists and pedestrians passed through the streets of Crich towards the tower, and, with commendable acumen, the local tradesmen and others laid themselves out to cater for the hungry and perspiring visitors. Special trains and chars-à-bancs were run from all parts, and there was a motor-bus service between Crich and Ambergate station.

Digitized by Google

" By 3.30 the crowd surrounding the foot of the tower had assumed gigantic proportions, and still the pilgrims to this elevated shrine came up in a steady stream. The weather was so good that it could not have been improved. A cool breeze swept over the top of the cliff from the infinite space above the valley of the Derwent, and the only drawback was that a low visibility considerably interfered with the enjoyment of the extensive view.

" Many of the members of the crowd wore war medals, and not a few had the appearance of men still suffering from the effects of the European holocaust. These were the most pathetic of all visitors: poor, broken men who had braved the difficulties of the long and steep climb and, possibly, suffered much pain in the process, that they might be present at the honouring of their lost comrades. .

" There was a representative gathering of past and present officers belonging to The Sherwood Foresters, amongst them being Lieut.-Col. J. H. Wybergh (commanding the 1st Battalion), Brig.-Gen. J. W. G. Roy, C.M.G. (who formerly commanded the 2nd Battalion), Brig.-Gen. Leveson-Gower, C.M.G., D.S.O. (who commanded the 2nd Battalion during the early part of the war), Lieut.-Col. K. C. Weldon, D.S.O. (1st Battalion), Lieut.-Col. C. H. Dumbell, D.S.O. (in command of the Depot at Normanton and Hon. Treasurer of the Memorial Fund), Major-Gen. C. C. Van Straubenzee, C.B., C.M.G. (commanding the 46th North-Midland Division), Col. Goodman (commanding the 139th T.A. Infantry Brigade), Capt. J. D'A. Whicher, Lieut.-Col. C. E. L. Graham, M.C., Lieut.-Col. Rook (commanding the 7th Robin Hoods Battalion), Major H. Bradwell (second-in-command of the Robin Hoods), Lieut.-Col. E. Hall, D.S.O. (6th Battalion), Lieut.-Col. T. C. Newbold (5th Battalion), Lieut.-Col. H. E. D. Wise, C.B.E. (commanding 3rd Battalion), Lieut.-Col. R. P. Sadler, Col. Abel Smith, D.S.O., M.C. (8th Battalion), Capt. Willison, D.S.O., M.C. (1st Battalion), Lieut. P. N. White (from the Normanton Depot), Major McGuire (county recruiting officer for Notts), Capt. A. Troops (county recruiting officer for Derbyshire), Capt. Finch, Capt. A. E. Pollard, Capt. and Qr.Mr. J. W. Keith (5th Battalion), Major and Qr.Mr. F. Tyler, Capt. J. W. Marriott, M.C. (17th Battalion), Major B. Checkland (second-in-command of the 5th Battalion), Major H. E. Franklin, D.S.O., Major C. D. Harvey, D.S.O. (1st Battalion, and first Hon. Treasurer of the Memorial Fund), Capt. J. H. M. Douglas, M.C. (Normanton Depot), Capt. and Qr.Mr. McGeevor (7th Battalion), Col. H. Mellish (8th Battalion and Vice-Chairman of the Notts County Council), and Lieut. J. K. L. Roberts (from the Depot).

" The absence of the 2nd Battalion on foreign service in India prevented that unit from being largely represented. Altogether there were 170 regular troops from the Normanton Barracks, in addition to the band of the 1st Battalion, which came specially from Aldershot, and representatives of the four Territorial battalions (5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th) now in camp at Carburton.

" The gathering also included the Bishop of Derby, Mr. E. C. Barnes (Chairman of the Derbyshire County Council), the Mayor of Nottingham (Alderman E. L. Manning), the Mayor of Derby (Alderman O. Ling), the Mayor of Chesterfield (Alderman J. Clarke), the Mayor of Mansfield (Councillor H. Daniels), the Sheriff of Nottingham (Councillor J. Farr), Mr. Barnet Kenyon, M.P., Capt. H. M. Haywood (Chief Constable of Derby), and Major P. F. M. Anley (Chief Constable of Derbyshire).

Opening of the Door.

" The ceremony of opening the door of the tower was performed by General Sir Horace L. Smith-Dorrien, G.C.B., G.C.M.G., D.S.O., Colonel of the Regiment. The service commenced at four o'clock with the singing of the hymn, ' O valiant hearts, who to your glory came ' (John S. Arkwright), the singing being led by the Band of the 1st Battalion. The lesson which followed was Revelation, chapter xxi, verses 1-7 inclusive, and was

Digitized by Google

read by the Rev. A. Stanley Bishop, Hon. Chaplain to the Forces. A golden key was then handed to General Smith-Dorrien by Capt. L. Brewill, who was associated with his late father, Colonel A. W. Brewill, in the designing of the tower, and the door was opened. The Right Rev. the Lord Bishop of Southwell, D.D., pronounced the dedicatory sentences.

"Amid a great silence the buglers of the 1st Battalion The Sherwood Foresters sounded the 'Last Post,' and then almost everyone in that great and reverent assembly joined in the singing of 'O God, our help in ages past.' This was, perhaps, the most impressive moment of all. When the Blessing had been uttered the 'Réveillé' rang out, carrying, as it always does, a note of cheer and hope for the future.

In Sight of All.

"The Duke of Portland, K.G., G.C.V.O., asked General Smith-Dorrien to address the assembly. The memorial, he said, was erected, not only in memory of 11,409 gallant and patriotic officers, non-commissioned officers, and men of the Regiment who lost their lives, but also to commemorate all their comrades, to the number of 140,000, who served in the thirty-two battalions of the Regiment, and to whom, no less than to the dead, we owed an immense debt of gratitude. The monument was designed by the late Colonel A. W. Brewill, whose skill in architecture was as notable as the gallant efficiency with which he commanded the 7th Battalion, the Robin Hoods, for a considerable period during the war. They very deeply regretted that he did not live to see his design translated into concrete reality. The names of those who died were recorded in vellum-bound Books of Remembrance deposited in the Central Public Library of Derby and in the Castle Museum at Nottingham, tablets recording the fact being placed on the front of the Derby Guild Hall and at St. Peter's Church, Nottingham. It was a great gratification that General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien had come. They remembered with pride and gratitude his glorious services at the beginning of the war, and it was most fitting that he, as Colonel-in-Chief of the Regiment, should discharge this inaugural function.

"The people of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire approved the site that had been chosen for the monument, and all classes had generously contributed towards the cost of its erection. Built on a hill, it would be seen for many miles in all directions. Here it would stand in the sight of all men and women, reminding them of the valour and patriotism of their countrymen. However long it might endure, it would be a conspicuous and encouraging reminder of the valour and patriotism of the men of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire who served, suffered, and died for their King and Country. When the youths of coming generations asked the meaning of this monument they would be thrilled with enthusiasm when the stirring tale of the Great War was told; and should the occasion arise (which, he prayed, might not be the case) they would, he hoped, be inspired to follow the noble example of those who in the Great War shirked no difficulty, shrank from no danger, but were faithful even unto death in their determination to do all that in them lay to uphold the honour, the freedom, and the integrity of our country and our Empire.

'His Beloved Regiment.'

"General Smith-Dorrien was received with hearty and enthusiastic cheers. He said the memorial was unique, and it seemed wonderful that, within a month of his giving up active employment in the Army, he should have the great honour of opening the war memorial of his own beloved Regiment. As he looked at the monument his heart swelled with gratitude to the people of the two counties to which the Regiment belonged, for

Digitized by Google

he knew that by their zeal and generosity, from the two Lord-Lieutenants down to the very lowliest, they had sustained the sacrifice and heroism of their soldiers. As Colonel of the Regiment he offered heartfelt thanks to all who had helped to bring the memorial about.

"The tower would be a reminder to their children of the 150,000 men who, leaving hearth and home, underwent hardships with marvellous endurance, and gave themselves body and soul to the Empire, which was struggling to save the world from an unscrupulous and insidious foe. It did not represent the whole of the men who went from the two counties, for there were large numbers of Yeomanry, Artillery, and other units which gave unstinted service. The Sherwood Foresters were in almost every fight of the war, and while there were hundreds of instances of marvellous bravery, there were none of which they need be ashamed. The name of the Sherwood Foresters became synonymous with bravery and fighting efficiency. He would suggest that every town and village in the two counties should follow the example of their capitals and erect tablets similar to those that were to be put up in Nottingham and Derby. In conclusion, the General appealed to them to see that neither want nor unemployment fell to the lot of these splendid fellows who saved the Empire in the hour of its need.

The Last War.

"The Duke of Devonshire, K.G., G.C.M.G., G.C.V.O., thanked General Smith-Dorrien on behalf of the two counties. He said that before war broke out they knew that when the occasion arose the Regiment would be worthy of its great tradition, and now they knew how well its work was done. But in addition to monuments of stone or brass, he trusted they might erect another memorial—that of a happy, prosperous country, engaged in bringing civilization back to a war-worn world, and that this tower would not be only a memorial of the 'Great' War, but of the last of all wars.

"The National Anthem brought the ceremony to a close, after which the public were admitted to the tower on payment of a small fee.

"Wreaths of remembrance were placed at the foot of the memorial by, amongst many others, The Sherwood Foresters Old Comrades Association, and all units that fought in the Great War."

Digitized by Google

IV.

A MEMORIAL IN THE CHAPEL OF THE ROYAL MILITARY COLLEGE, SANDHURST

To Officers of the Sherwood Foresters who were Cadets at the Royal Military College.

The Memorial consists of a white marble slab bearing the Regimental Crest, with the names of the officers as under, surrounded by a frame of carved oak :—

1914 Lieut. L. A. Bernard
2nd Lieut. D. R. P. Milner
Lieut. P. M. Murray
Lieut. MacL. P. Dilworth
2nd Lieut. L. G. H. Harris

1915 Lieut. G. E. Burdekin
Lieut. E. M. Williamson
Major P. G. Rigby
Capt. W. C. Stackhouse
Lieut. R. E. C. Weigall
Lieut. R. W. Rundle
Lieut. J. V. Earle
Lieut. R. Burton
Major J. G. Blackburne
Major T./Lt.-Col. L. A. Bosanquet

1916 2nd Lieut. L. R. A. Dicksee
2nd Lieut. A. L. Connor
Lieut. H. P. Rogers
2nd Lieut. F. J. M. Shaw
Capt. C. S. C. Kennedy
Major T./Lt.-Col. C. J. W. Hobbs, D.S.O.
2nd Lieut. S. M. Williams

1917 2nd Lieut. E. C. Helmore
2nd Lieut. G. G. Furness
Capt. T./Maj. G. D. Mills
Lieut. T./Capt. E. H. Binney
2nd Lieut. C. E. Blurton

1918 Capt. T/Maj. H. L. Paddock
2nd Lieut. G. V. Marriott
2nd Lieut. H. E. Hudson
Major R. J. Lowcock, D.S.O., M.C.
2nd Lieut. D. J. Clarkson
Capt. T./Lt.-Col. W. A. W. Crellin, D.S.O.
2nd Lieut. J. L. Tombazis, D.S.O., M.C.
2nd Lieut. A. S. Cleveland
Lieut. T. W. C. Irwin

1919 Lieut. T./Maj. D. F. S. Vowler
2nd Lieut. A. L. Tupman

"This tablet has been erected by past and present officers of The Sherwood Foresters to the glory of God and in proud memory of the officers of the Regiment whose names are inscribed hereon."

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

INDEX

Abbott, Lieut. F. H. E., 171; Capt., killed, 173
Abbotts, 2/Lt. G. D. M., 41, 49, 50; wounded, 65
Abram, Pte. G., 196
Adams, 2/Lt. P. H., 72, 172
Adams, Sergt. A., 196
Addison-Smith, Major, Seaforth Highlanders, assumes command 2nd Bn., 135, 138
Adkin, Sergt., 17
Ainslie, Brig.-Gen., 109
Aisne, Battle of the, 95 *et seq.*; casualties at, 99
Albert, 157
Albutt, 2/Lt. H., 171
Allen, 2/Lt. B. G., 21, 94; wounded, 99
Allen, 2/Lt. M. R., killed, 127
Allenby, Maj.-Gen., 92, 134, 150
Allerton, Capt. C. A., Suffolk Regt., assumes command of 2nd Bn., 164
Allevi, L./Cpl. A., 85
"Alma Day," 1914, 96
Ambler, 2/Lt. C., 22, 26, 29; wounded, 65
America enters the war, 73, 138
Anley, Capt. P. F. R., 100, 102
Anson, Capt. G. L., 100, 102-5
Armentières, 107
Armies, *First*, 12, 16, 46, 128, 134; *Second*, 12, 16, 46, 134, 166, 189; *Third*, 46, 54, 134, 150, 157, 160; *Fourth*, 29, 30, 45, 46, 124, 134, 174, 189; *Fifth*, 46, 47, 54, 120, 134, 160
Armistice announced, 187
Armitage, Capt. W. A., 106
Armstrong, Co. Q.M.-Sergt. G., 196
Arras, Second Battle of, 69 *et seq.*
Ash, Lieut. B. C., 94; killed, 98, 99

Babington, General, 29, 33, 35
Backhouse, Capt. H. E., killed, 128, 129
Backhouse, Pte., first casualty in the war, 9
Baines, Pte. T., 188
Bailleul, 51
Baldwin, L./Cpl. P. C., 85
Bandy, Drmr. E., 196
Bankhead-Browne, Capt. A. E., North Stafford Regt., 7, 10, 11
Barnes, 2/Lieut. B. G., 134; wounded, 138
Barnes, 2/Lieut. P. C., 134
Barnes, 2/Lieut. T. A. R., 127
Barnes, 2/Lieut. W. E., 51
Barisis, 160
Baron, 2/Lieut. S. P., 29, 31, 35
Barratt, 2/Lieut. H. T., 114
Barratt, Sergt.-Cook F., 94, 188
Barratt, Sergt., 123
Barringer, 2/Lieut. R. E., 29, 31
Base, Change of, 93
Battersby, Shoemaker-Sergt. C. H., 94, 188
Baxter, 2/Lieut. B. M., 46
Bealey, Co. Sergt.-Major E., 85
Beanland, 2/Lieut. G. E., 135; killed, 137
Beardall, 2/Lieut. T. G., 29
Beardsley, Pte., 136
Beaufort, 148
Beaumont Hamel, 120, 123
Bebbington, Pte. C., 85
Beedham, Lieut. N. H., 138, 157; Capt., 161; missing, 165
Bell, 2/Lieut., 157
Bellewaarde Ridge, 47, 48, 49 *et seq*
Belton, Lieut. R. D., 66; wounded, 70
Bemrose, Pte. J., 80
Benett-Dampier, 2/Lieut. J. T., 106
Benford, Lieut. M. L., 41; wounded, 114
Benner, 2/Lieut., 156
Bennett, Lieut. F. H., wounded, 184
Bentley, Drmr., 113
Bentley, Corpl. G., 188
Bernafay Wood, 128
Bernard, Lieut. L. A., 94; killed, 98, 99
Berry, 2/Lieut. S. G., 189, 191
Beugny, 163, 164, 174
Beuvry, 135
Binney, Lieut. E. H., 15; wounded, 18
Bion, Lieut. K. N., 26, 29; Capt., 31; wounded, 33-5, 163; killed, 164
Birley, 2/Lieut. N. P., 21, 26, 29
Blanchard, Co.-Sergt.-Major, 6
Blaxland, 2/Lieut., 19
Blythe, Corpl., 83
Bohain, 180
Bombay, 1; 1st Bn. sails from, 5
Boothroyd, 2/Lieut. E., 157; missing, 165
Bourg, 96
Bourlon Wood, 153
Bower, Lieut. H. R., 85, 86
Bowey, Lieut. J. W., 191
Bowman, Lieut. T. S., Royal Sussex, wounded, 21
Bowmer, Lieut. W. H., 36; Capt., 72
Bowring, Lieut. A. G., 195, 198
Boyd, Lieut. W. A., 161, 164
Bradbury, Pte., 9
Bradley, Sergt. C. E., 85
Bradshaw, Major F. E., 128; Lt.-Col., 136, 139, 142, 147; wounded, 148
Braithwaite, Lt.-Gen. Sir W., 174, 184
Brandt, 2/Lieut. W. E., wounded, 127
Brearley, Co. Sergt.-Major, 6
Brewer, Lieut. W. A., 46; killed, 52
Bridges, 2/Lieut., 36
Bridgford, Brig.-Gen. R. J., 127, 193
Brigades—*3rd*, 92, 96; *16th*, 92; *17th*, 92; *18th*, 92; *23rd*, 16; *24th*, 5, 11, 16, 19, 54, 56; *25th*, 16, 19, 49, 55; *57th*, 32, 33; *62nd*, 135; *69th*, 35; *71st*, 2nd Bn. transferred to, 115, 130; *137th*, 142; *139th*, 139; *147th*, 115, 139
Bright, 2/Lieut. H. V., 138, 157; killed, 177

Digitized by Google

Brindley, 2/Lieut. C. B., 26, 29
Brittan, 2/Lieut. J., 127
Brook, Lieut. D. G., 127
Brown, Brig.-Gen. P. W., 146, 165, 192, 195
Brown, 2/Lieut. E., 116; wounded, 127; Lieut., 152
Brown, 2/Lieut. H. A., 189, 191
Brown, 2/Lieut. R. O., 26
Brown, 2/Lieut. W. E., missing, 65
Brown, L./Sergt. W., 196
Brown, Transport Sergt. W., 7
Brown, Pte. F. E., 188
Browne, 2/Lieut. A. G., 102; killed, 105
Brownrigg, Capt. W. D. S., 1, 5
Bruhl, 190
Bryant, Boy F. C., 85
Bryant, Pte. H., 196
Bunting, 2/Lieut. K. J., 127; wounded, 129
Burke, 2/Lieut. V. B., 106
Burns, Lieut. W., killed, 164
Burnett-Hitchcock, Colonel B. F., 28
Burrows, 2/Lieut. P. E., 26, 29; Lieut., wounded, 35
Burt, 2/Lieut. F. W., 29, 31, 35
Burton, 2/Lieut. R., 11; wounded, 17
Butcher, Sergt., 37
Butler, Gen., 58
Buxton, 2/Lieut. L. F., wounded, 57
Byles, 2/Lieut. H. B., 119, 128, 146
Byng, Gen., 46, 54, 150, 160

Cadby, 2/Lieut., 84
Cadre, 1st Bn., goes home, 85; 2nd Bn., 195, 196
Callaway, 2/Lieut. R. F., killed, 127
Cambridge, 2nd Bn. at, 93
Cameron, Gen., 169
Campbell, Capt. D. W. G., South Stafford Regt., 7, 9; killed, 10
Cambrai, Battle of, 149 *et seq.*; results of, 156
Cannings, Drmr. M., 196
Carter, Brig.-Gen., 5
Carey, Brig.-Gen. G. G. S., 139
Carter, 2/Lieut. H., wounded, 114
Cartledge, 2/Lieut. G., 131
Cashmore, 2/Lieut. L., 171; Capt., wounded, 184
Casualties—At Chemin des Dames, 65; Neuve Chapelle, 18; Rouges Bancs, 21; Ypres, 49; Hooge, 114; Somme (2nd Bn.), 127; Cambrai Battle, 156; 2nd Bn., March, 1918, 164; 1st Bn. in the war, 80
Castle, Capt. S. M., 1, 3, 4, 6-7
Caunt, 2/Lieut., 36
Caunt, Pte., 42
Cavan, Gen. Earl of, 38, 45, 119, 124
Chalk, Pte. H., 85
Chalmers, 2/Lieut. J. A., 189
Chamberlain, Capt. L. B., 101
Chambers, Cr. Sergt. C. R.; promoted 2/Lieut., 6, 7; Lieut., 22; Capt., 26, 29
Chambers, Lieut. G. H., 1
Chamnass, Lieut. E. C., U.S. Army, Medical Officer, 2nd Bn., 191
Chance, Lieut. N. R. L., 106
Chandler, Pte., 9
Charlesworth, Lieut. W. wounded, 127
Chatteris, Capt. T. B., 112-14, killed
Chatterton, 2/Lieut. A. A., 66
Chemin des Dames, 61 *et seq.*, 96
Chidlow-Roberts, Lieut. J. R., 106
Christie, Drmr. W., 196
Chorley, Pte. T., 85
Clarke, Lieut. H. C., 72, 81
Clarke, Regtl. Q.M.-Sergt. A. W., 94; promoted 2/Lieut., 99, 100
Clarke, Pte., 12
Clay, L./Corpl. G. W., 188, 196
Clay, Pte. W. H., 188
Clayton, 2/Lieut. J. A., 66, 84
Clemer, Boy A., 85
Clemerson, Pte., 189
Cleveland, 2/Lieut. A. S., 126, 127; killed, 129
Clulow, 2/Lieut. F. R., wounded, 61
Coates, L./Corpl. F. M., 85
Cobham, Brig.-Gen., 41, 46
Cockayne, Regtl. Sergt.-Major A., 196
Cockbill, Co. Sergt.-Major, 6
Coleman, Corpl. E., 80
Collen, Major F. D., 180, 191
Collin, Major E. N. T., 36, 42
Collins, Capt., R.A.M.C., 19
Cologne, 191
Colours, Return of the, 83
Coman, Lieut. and Qrmr. F. A. W., 26, 29
Congreve, Brig.-Gen. W. N., 92, 96, 101, 104, 109; Major-Gen., 115, 193
Concannon, Pte., 44
Connor, 2/Lieut. A. L., 138; killed, 143
Contalmaison, action at, 34, 35
Cooke, Transport Sergt. W. H., 94; 2/Lieut., killed, 114
Cooper, 2/Lieut. S., 156; wounded, 164
Cooper, 2/Lieut. P. N., 26, 29, 31, 35
Cooper, 2/Lieut. G. P., 191
Cooper, Pte., 9
Cootes, Pte. A. F., 85
Cope, 2/Lieut. R. E., 189, 191
Copland, 2/Lieut. D. C. J., 21
Corless, 2/Lieut. J. S., 171; killed, 176
Cornish, Corpl. A. E., 196
Corps—*I.*, 12, 16, 19, 91, 96; *II.*, 12, 29, 31, 46, 47, 81, 91, 96, 100, 172; *III.*, 12, 16, 27, 58, 81, 100, 124; *IV.*, 10, 12, 14, 16, 19, 21, 160, 162; *V.*, 12; *VI.*, 109, 160; VIII., 50, 65, 72, *IX.*, 61, 174, 177, 189; *XIII.*, 115; *XIV.*, 27, 45, 47, 124; *XV.*, 41, 124; *XVII.*, 160; *XVIII.*, 47, 160; *XIX.*, 47, 55, 160, 172; 2nd Australian, 51; Indian, 11, 12, 16, 19, 21
Cotterill, Drmr. A., 196
Cotton, Boy R. M., 85
Cousins, 2/Lieut. E. C., 127, 138; missing, 165
Coventry, Capt. A. J., 188
Cowe, 2/Lieut. J., missing, 177
Cowen, 2/Lieut. J. W., 66
Cowern, Co. Sergt.-Maj. G., 196
Cowgill, Lieut. J. I. W., 108, 119, 136; Capt., 146; wounded, 148, 184
Cowley, 2/Lieut. A., killed, 141-3, 147
Cox, Co. Sergt.-Maj., killed, 33
Cox, 2/Lieut. C. F., 51; killed, 57
Coxon, 2/Lieut. W. H., 13; killed, 17
Crellin, 2/Lieut. W. A. W., 36-8, 94; wounded, 99, 108

Digitized by Google

Crichell, Boy H., 85
"Crisis in the War," 165
Crofton-Atkins, Lieut.-Col. C. R., 94, 100, 101
Crosby, 2/Lieut. R. D., 106; Capt., 112, 113
Crosby, Drmr. K., 196
Crossland, Pte. J., 196
Cuckson, Co. Sergt.-Maj. T. M., 94
Cuckson, Corpl. G., 196
Cumberland, 2/Lieut. C. E., 41; wounded, 57, 65
Cutts, Pte. F., 85

Dady, Sergt., 3
Daniels, 2/Lieut. C. W., 51
Davey, 2/Lieut., 102; missing, 105
Davidson, 2/Lieut. J. W., 27, 41; killed, 43
Davies, Capt. A. V., 191
Davies, Maj.-Gen., 5
Davis, 2/Lieut. F., 127
Davis, 2/Lieut. W. H., 119; wounded, 127; killed, 141, 142, 143
Dawson, 2/Lieut. L. L., missing, 65
Dean, 2/Lieut. A. A., 50; wounded, 61
Demobilization, 82 *et seq.*
Derby, reception of 2nd Bn. Cadre at, 196-8
Devereux, Pte. A., 196
Dewsall, Bdmr. A. H., 85
Dexter, 2/Lieut. G. S., wounded, 50
Dick, 2/Lieut. G. F. G., killed, 21
Dickebusch Lake, 172
Dicksee, Lieut. R. F., killed, 184
Dilworth, Lieut. McL. P., 1, 3, 5, 7; killed, 9, 10, 12
Divisions—*Guards*, 124; *1st*, 91, 174; *2nd*, 91; *3rd*, 92, 150; *4th*, 92, 100, 107; *5th*, 92; *6th*, 92, 100, 124, 143, 150, 174; *8th*, 5, 11, 47, 58, 61; *12th*, 73, 150; *14th*, 124; *15th*, 124; *16th*, 150; *18th*, 47; *19th*, 65; *20th*, 150; *21st*, 61, 65; *23rd*, 28, 29, 33; *24th*, 47; *25th*, 48, 120; *27th*, 109; *29th*, 13; *30th*, 47, 50; *32nd*, 174; *36th*, 150; *41st*, 124; *46th*, 139, 174; *47th*, 124; *49th*, 115, 139, 169; *50th*, 61, 124; *51st*, 68, 69, 160, 163; *56th*, 124; *58th*, 58; *62nd*, 150; *New Zealand*, 124
Divisional Reorganization, 53
Dixon, Capt. H. B., 1, 7; killed, 18.
Dobbie, Lieut. G. S., 1, 3, 5, 7; Capt., 191
Dodge, Sergt. H., 188
Donaldson, 2/Lieut. G. J. R., 189
Doon Hill, 178-180
Doon Mill, 178-180
Douglas, Lieut. J. H. M., 1, 5, 7; Capt., wounded, 14, 69, 72
Dove, Major P. M., 106; killed, 109
Dranoutre, 170
Drocourt—Quéant Line, 73
Drums and Fifes, 120
Drury, 2/Lieut. E., 66
Drury-Lowe, Capt. E. N., 100, 101, 103-5
Drynan, Lieut. R. M., 119
Du Cane, Gen. Sir J., 41
Dumbell, Major C. H., 146, 147; Lieut.-Col. 195

Eagle, Pte. W., 196
Eagley, Pte. H., 196
Ebsworth, Lieut. W. A., 19; wounded, 21; wounded, 127, 191
Edinburgh, 2nd Bn. at, 93
Edmeades, Capt. H., 106
Edward, L./Corpl. C., 196
Edwards, Brig.-Gen., 130
Edwards, 2/Lieut. A. S., 110
Edwards, Lieut. G. D., 94, 102; missing, 105
Edwards, 2/Lieut. W. A., 127, 134; wounded, 135, 138, 141; Lieut., 152-4
Edwards, Major J., 64, 66, 77
Eicholtz, Lieut. R. N., 46
Elliott, 2/Lieut. W. J. R., 36; wounded, 65
Ellis, 2/Lieut. H., 127
Ellissen, 2/Lieut. F. K., 189, 191
Else, Co. Sergt.-Maj., killed, 137
Elsenborn, 190
Emblem, 2/Lieut. T. H., killed, 61
Ennetières, action at, 102 *et seq.*
Estaires, 11
Everett, Lieut. C. F. G., 191
Eyre, 2/Lieut. H., 157, 159; wounded, 171
Expeditionary Force, composition of, 91; strength in 1916, 122

Farley, Signalling Sergt. J., 94
Fearn, Pte. G., 196
Feetham, Brig.-Gen. E., 130, 193
Fellowes, 2/Lieut. R. W., 117; killed, 127
Ferguson, Sergt., 42
Field, Lieut. J. G., 66
Fielding, Lieut. F. W., 152
Finch, Capt. H. L., 156; missing, 165
Flanders offensive, 58 *et seq.*
Flanders fighting, 169 *et seq.*
Fletcher, 2/Lieut. P., 26; wounded, 115
Fleurbaix, 22
Foch, Gen., assumes command, 55, 61, 78, 187
Forster, Pte. F. P., 85
Foster, Capt., 28
Foster, Lieut. O., 116
Fox-Pitt, 2/Lieut. W. A. F. L., 106
Frakes, Pte. A., 85
Frape, Pte. R. R., 85
Freer, L./Corpl. J., 80
Freeth, 2/Lieut. H. F., 191
French, F.M. Sir J., 15, 19, 25; hands over command, 91
Frend, Capt. W. R., 94; killed, 99
Frereson, 2/Lieut. C. A., 189
Freshney, Pte. C., 80
Frost, Lieut. G. W., 119
Furness, 2/Lieut. G. G., 127, 134; killed, 135

Gamble, 2/Lieut. A., 51
Gamble, 2/Lieut. G. M., 108; wounded, 109; Capt., 141; wounded, 142, 143
Gardiner, 2/Lieut., 136
Garton, 2/Lieut. J. B., 66
Gauntlett, Lieut. F. E., 36, 37, 127; Capt., wounded, 143
Germany, 2nd Bn. enter, 189
Gerard, 2/Lieut. V. A., 191
Gerrard, 2/Lieut. A. F., 69; wounded, 70
Gibbons, Capt. F. J., 125; wounded, 127
Giles, 2/Lieut. A. S., 36, 37
Giles, 2/Lieut. A. H. A., 141, 147; capt., 161, 164, 191

Digitized by Google

Gill, Capt. A. L., 191, 195, 198
Gleave, Capt. G. M., 36-8; killed, 43, 114
Glen, 2/Lieut., 114
Glover, Pte. H., 196
Goddard, Boy A., 85
Godley, Sergt. F., 85
Goodwyn, Lieut. A. J., 1, 7; Capt., 41
Gordon-Taylor, 2/Lieut., 162
Gorringe, Maj.-Gen., 1, 3
Gough, Gen., 46, 47, 54, 134, 160
Gray, Lieut. P. H. H., 36, 37
Gray, 2/Lieut. A., 191
Greaves, 2/Lieut. H., 64, 66, 69, 71, 72, 83
Green, 2/Lieut. W. L., 51; wounded, 57, 65
Green, Drmr. A., 196
Greenhalgh, Pte., 158
Greensmith, 2/Lieut. E. B., 41
Greensmith, 2/Lieut. W., 46, 50; missing, 57
Greg, 2/Lieut. A. T., 106
Gregory, 2/Lieut. S., 135, 157
Gregory, Pte. W., 80
Griffiths, Capt., wounded, 119, 135
Grounds, 2/Lieut. K., 119; wounded, 127
Groves, Capt. J. D., 138
Groves, 2/Lieut., 142
Grundy, Sergt., 117
Guillemont, 124

Hackman, 2/Lieut. W., 191
Haig, Gen. Sir D., 19, inspects 1st Bn., 28, 92
Hagger, Pte. J. E., 188
Hall, Lieut., killed, 43
Hall, Pte. P. W., 85
Hallowes, Bdsmn. J., 188
Hamilton, Capt. C. M. B., 106
Hamilton-Gordon, Lt.-Gen. Sir A., 61-4
Hancock, 2/Lieut. G. A., 66; Capt., 85, 86
Hancock, Lieut. L. W., 114, 115; wounded, 127
Handley, Pte. E., 196
Hands, 2/Lieut. W. E., 131, 134; wounded, 135
Haines, Pte. T., 196
Hardy, Capt. P., wounded, 184
Hardy, Pte., 18
Harrison, 2/Lieut. C., 51; missing, 65
Harrison, 2/Lieut. V., 189, 191
Harrison, Co. Sergt.-Maj., killed, 142
Harrison, Pte. G., 188
Hart, 2/Lieut. C. W., 66
Hart, 2/Lieut. E. H., 66
Hart, Pte. W., 196
Havre, 1st Bn. arrives at, 7, 8
Haw, Sgt.-Drmr. T., 196
Hawkins, 2/Lieut. L. W., 191
Hayes, Pte. T., 196
Heath, 2/Lieut. A. F., 29, 31; wounded, 65
Helmets, steel, first worn, 114
Hemingway, 2/Lieut. G., 41
Hemstock, 2/Lieut. F., 157; missing, 165
Heneker, Maj.-Gen., 51, 57, 67, 70, 72, 84
Henencourt Wood, 31
Hepburn, Arm.-Sergt. D., 94
Herron, Capt. J. R. B., 191
Hewitt, Pnr.-Sergt. E., 94
Hiam, L./Sergt. J. A., 85
Hill, 2/Lieut. H. F., 189, 191, 196, 198
Hindenburg Line, 73, 133 *et seq.*; attack on, 174 *et seq.*, 177.
Hinderlich, 2/Lieut. F. R., 46; wounded, 65
Hinett, Sergt., 25
Hirst, Co. Q.M.-Sergt., 6
Hobbs, Capt. C. J. W., 38, 106; Lt.-Col. 126-8; killed, 129
Hodgson, Capt. M. K., 1, 3, 4, 7, 8, *et seq.*; mortally wounded, 17
Holden, 2/Lieut. W. S., 110; Capt., 125; wounded, 127
Holmes, Pte. W., 117
Holnon Village, 175
Holnon Wood, 174
Horne, Gen., 46, 128, 134
Hopkins, 2/Lieut. H. G. B., 29
Hopkins, Pte. A., 196
Hooge, Battle of, 111, *et seq.*
Hostilities cease, 85
Houplines, 108
Houseman, Lieut. J. W., 66
Hovell, 2/Lieut., 36
Howard, Lieut. K. S., 72
Howell, Capt., R.A.M.C., 7, 19
Howes, Corpl. J., 188
Hoyle, Lieut. G. M., killed, 114
Hudson, Maj.-Gen. H., 23, 35
Hudson, Lt.-Col. C. E., assumes command of 2nd Bn., 177, 178, 191
Hudson, Lieut. T. H., 100, 102; missing, 105
Hulett, Pte. J., 80
Hume, Capt. H. B. T., 1, 3, 4, 6-7
Hunt, Sergt. G., 80
Hunter-Weston, Gen., 72
Hursley Park, 5, 6
Hutchings, Lieut., U.S. Army, 52
Hyde, Pte. G. T., 188
Hyrons, 2/Lieut. F. A., 127

Inman, 2/Lieut. T. E., missing, 65
Irwin, Lieut. T. W. C., 171; wounded, 184
Ives, Pte., 136

Jackson, Lieut. A. H., 1, 7, 10
Jackson, 2/Lieut. V., 119, 135. 136
Jarratt, 2/Lieut. A., 189
Jarratt, L.-Cpl., 43
Jacob, Gen., 46, 172
Jacobs, Corpl. A., 196
Jepson, Drmr. F., 196
Jennings, Boy T. P., 85
Joffre, Gen., 133
Johnson, Lieut. R. A., killed, 61
Johnson, O.-R.-Sergt. R., 7
Johnson, Pte. W., 196
Jones, Lieut. C. N., 117
Jones, 2/Lieut. F. E., 116; Lieut., 120; Capt., 128
Jones, Pte., 113
Joyce, Pte. P., 188, 196

Kaine, Lieut. A. J., 117, 123; wounded, 127
Kay, 2/Lieut. G. A., killed, 114
Keatley, 2/Lieut. C. B., wounded, 176, 191
Keech, 2/Lieut. A. F., 189, 191
Keir, Maj.-Gen. J. L., 92, 109, 114, 193
Kelk, 2/Lieut. B. M., 46
Kemmel Hill. 169, 170
Kemp, Sergt., 42
Kennedy, 2/Lieut. C. S. C., 1, 6; wounded, 21
Kent, 2/Lieut. A., 171, 173

Digitized by Google

Kerrick, 2/Lieut. H. L., 127
Keyworth, 2/Lieut. W. A., 189, 191
Killer, 2/Lieut. A., 51; wounded, 57
Kilmister, Pte. W., 85
King, 2/Lieut. E., 66; wounded, 70
Kingscote, Capt. E. T., 106
Kirkman, Pte. J., 196
Kitchener, F.M. Lord, 91
Knights, Co. Q.M.-Sgt., 6
Knowles, Lieut. A., 41
Kyle, 2/Lieut. F. G., wounded, 65

La Boisselle, 32 *et seq.*
La Flinque, 16
Lagnicourt, 162
Lambert, Lt.-Col., E. Lanc. Regt., 22, 23
Lander, Lieut. A. J. M., 116
Lang, Lieut. J. A. M., 1, 5, 7; Capt., 11, 28
Last, Corpl. E., 80
Last, A./Corpl. J. W., 85
La Vallée, 104, 105
Lawler, 2/Lieut. A., wounded, 176
Laws, Lieut. C. W., missing, 65
Lawson, Pte. W., 196
Lawson, Qrmr. E. E., 85
Lawton, Boy W. H., 85
Lee, Pte. E., 196
Le Bizet, 108
Lens, fighting near, 139 *et seq.*
Leveson-Gower, Major P., 94, 98, 100, 102-6; Lieut.-Col., 109
Lightfoot, 2/Lieut. A. C., 29, 31
Linay, Capt. W. C., 66
Little, 2/Lieut. J., 191
Longson, 2/Lieut. W. B., 51
Loos, Battle of, 23 *et seq.*
Lound, O.-R.-Sergt. E. J., 94, 188
Love, Drmr. W., 196
Loveday, 2/Lieut. C. B., killed, 127, 129
Loverseed, L./Sergt. J., 188, 189
Lowe, L./Corpl. W. H., 188, 196
Ludendorff, Gen., 130
Luther, Capt. G. F., 94; wounded, 99
Lynch, Pte. C. F., 85
Lyle, 2/Lieut. J., wounded, 176

MacBean, 2/Lieut. I. G., 94; wounded, 99
McCluskie, Pnr.-Sergt., 7
McCullock. Drmr. D., 196
McDonald, Co. Q.M.-Sergt. W., 94
McDonald, 2/Lieut. A. T., 191
McDonnell, 2/Lieut. F., 189
Machon, Drmr. F., 196
McLoughlin, Corpl. J., 196
McTernan, Boy C., 85
Maddison, Pte. H., 80
Malcourone, Lieut., 41
Maltby, Pte. E., 188
Mann, Co. Sergt.-Maj. A., 85
Mann, Pte., 117
March, Lieut. G. T., 114; Capt., 125; wounded, 127
March, 2/Lieut. H. H., wounded, 184
Marcoing, 153-5
Marden, Maj.-Gen. T. O., 146, 192
Marshall, Col. W. R., 1-7, 11, 13; Maj.-Gen., 51
Martin, Lieut. P. C., 102, 114, 141, 142; wounded, 143
Martin, 2/Lieut. G. C. R., 100, 102; missing, 105
Martin, Regtl. Sgt.-Maj. C., 85
Martin, Sgt.-Drmr. C., 94
Martyr, 2/Lieut. J. W., 29, 31
Mason, Lieut., wounded, 35
Mason, 2/Lieut. T., 51
Mason, Q.M.-Sgt. (O.-R.-Sgt.), 95
Mathias, Capt. J. H., 94; wounded, 99
Maxwell, Pte. W., 85
May, Lieut. R. G. S., 100, 102; missing, 105
Mayo, 2/Lieut. B. A. J., 66
Mazingarbe, 135
Meek, 2/Lieut. W., killed, 176
Mellors, Lieut. F. J., 119, 124, 126; wounded, 127
Menin Road, 111
Menzies, Lieut. J. F., 21, 26, 29; missing, 65
Middleton, 2/Lieut. B., 51
Millar, Lieut. E. F., 19, 20; wounded, 21
Millar, Sergt., 9
Millin, 2/Lieut. A., missing, 177
Millis, Lieut. C. H. G., 21, 26, 29; wounded, 33-5
Mills, Lieut. G. D., 1, 5
Mills, Pte., 43
Milner, 2/Lieut. R. D. P., 94; killed, 98, 99
Millward, O.-R.-Sgt. A., 7
Millward, 2/Lieut. A., wounded, 65
Millward, Boy W. H., 85
Millward, 2/Lieut. J., 66
Milward, Lt.-Col. H. M., 35, assumes command of 2nd Bn., 153, 158, 161, 166, 172, 177, 191, 195
Milward, Lieut. R. G., 114
Missett, Pte. J., 85
Mitchell, Maj. J. D., 66, 70, 85-7
Mitchell, 2/Lieut. G. C., missing, 165
Mobilization, 91, 92
Molloy, 2/Lieut. M. V., killed, 114
Monro, Gen. Sir C., 35, 36
Moore, 2/Lieut. R. F., 22, 26, 29; Capt., 49; Maj., 54; Lt.-Col., 55; killed, 65
Moore, Pte. T., 85
Morley, Maj. L. St. H., 1, 3-7, 17; wounded, 20, 21
Morris, 2/Lieut. L. P., wounded, 170
Mortimer, Mach.-Gun.-Sgt. L., 94
Mortimore, Maj. C. R., 1, 4, 7, 14; wounded, 17, 19, 196, 197
Morton, Cook-Sergt. A., 85
Morton, Regtl. Sergt.-Maj., 31
Moult, Lieut. S. W., killed, 119, 127
Mudge, Lieut. J. B., 26, 29; Capt., 52
Muhlig, Col.-Sergt., promoted 2/Lieut., 6
Munro-Faure, Lieut. P. H., wounded, 21; Capt., 119
Murphy, Capt. M., R.A.M.C., 26
Murray, Lieut. P. M., 94, 98; killed, 99

Naylor, Pte. W., 85
Needham, Lieut. J. McD., 22, 94
Needham, 2/Lieut. J. W., 66, 83; wounded, 99
Needham, Pte. F., 80
Neuf Berquin, 8

Digitized by Google

Neuve Chapelle, Battle of, 15 *et seq.*
Neuve Eglise, 169, 170
Neild, 2/Lieut. A., missing, 65
Neilson, 2/Lieut., 36
Nelson, Lieut. A. A., 116
Neville, 2/Lieut. C., 21, 26, 29; Capt., 31; wounded, 33, 34; killed, 35
Neville, 2/Lieut. C., 108
Newton, 2/Lieut. D., 189, 191
Newton, Pte. S., 80
Nicholson, 2/Lieut. A., 157, 172
Nicholson, 2/Lieut. R. R., wounded, 170, 172; killed, 176
Nivelle, Gen., 133
Noble, Regtl.-Q.M.-Sgt. W., 188, 196
North, 2/Lieut. R. D., 117
Nottingham, Cadre at, 85; reception at, 86, 87

Oakes, Co. Sgt.-Maj. G., 188, 196
O'Connor, Capt. R. D., R.A.M.C., 94, 102, 104, 105, 106
O'Dwyer, 2/Lieut. J. E. A., 1, 7; wounded, 18
O'Hare, 2/Lieut. T. P., wounded, 61
Oldershaw, Pte. A., 196
Oppy Wood, 69 *et seq.*
Orme, Pte. W. H., 85
Orr, Major, R.A.M.C., 51
Osborn, Brig.-Gen. W. L., 137, 193
Ottlewell, Corpl., 83
Overland, Sergt. E., 80
Oxley, Brig.-Gen. R. S., 19, 34

Packer, L./Corpl. A., 196
Paddock, 2/Lieut. H. L., 94; wounded, 99, 108
Page, 2/Lieut. R., 116
Paget, Pte. A., 196
Painter, Pte., 9
Palmer, 2/Lieut. R., died of wounds, 114
Palmer, Pte. H., 85
Parish, Pte. W., 85
Parkinson, Capt. C. C., 94, 97-9, wounded
Paterson, 2/Lieut. R. W., 135, 138; missing, 165
Pattinson, 2/Lieut. E., 46
Paviour, Pte. W., 85
Pearse, 2/Lieut. R. G., 36; Capt., wounded, 49, 69, 72
Penn, Co. Q.M.-Sgt. F., 188, 196
Penn, Pte., 10
Penton, 2/Lieut. R. H., 134
Periscopes, 106
Perkins, Lieut. W., 26
Perry, 2/Lieut. C. S., wounded, 171
Peterkin, Regtl. Sgt.-Maj., 7
Picton, 2/Lieut., 156
Pinniger, Shmkr.-Sgt., 7
Phelps, Maj. M. P., 1
Phillips, Bdsmn. W., 80
Phillips, Pte., 44
Phillips, Pte. W., 85
Phipps, L./Corpl. W., 196
Plant, 2/Lieut. T. P.; missing, 177
Plant, Pte. J., 80
Platt, Lieut. W. A., 134, 138, 157; wounded, 158
Ploegsteert, 50
Plumer, Gen., 46, 114, 134, 166, 189
Polygon Wood, 48
Pont du Hem, 9, 10
Pont Logy, 16
Poperinghe, 115
Popham, Capt. R. S., 94, 97-9
Portland, Duke of, 86
Poston, Regtl. Sgt.-Maj. S., 163
Powdrill, Pte. L., 85
Pownall, Corpl. J. H., 188
Proctor, 2/Lieut. H. H.; wounded, 184
Profit, 2/Lieut. G. S. W.; missing, 165
Proven, 172
Pridmore, Corpl. T., 188, 196
Pritchard, Co. Sergt.-Maj., 6
Pullen, Lieut., U.S. Army, 52
Pulteney, Gen., 21, 27, 100
Puxon, Capt. E. F. M., 85, 86

Quadrilateral, 124, 126 (Somme), 175, 176 (Flanders).

Rawlinson, Gen., 10, 30, 45, 46, 124, 129, 134, 184, 189
Raynor, Co.-Sgt.-Maj., 6
Raynes, Sergt., 33
Redfern, Pte., 117
Redgate, 2/Lieut. J. H., 171, 176
Rees, Sergt. W. H., promoted, 99; 2/Lieut. 102; missing, 105
Regiments—1st Black Watch, 96; 9th Cheshire, 156; Coldstream Gds., 118; 2nd Devon, 54, 60; 2nd Durham L.I., 60, 92, 112; 2nd E. Lanc., 9, 11, 16, 47, 50, 54; 1st E. York, 92, 96. 112; 11th Essex, 146, 147, 151, 152, 194; 1st Gloucester, 96; 1st Leicester, 115, 135, 151, 154, 194; 17th Manchester, 47, 50; 2nd Middlesex, 60; 9th Norfolk, 115, 135, 139, 151, 162, 170, 194; 2nd Northampton, 44, 49, 54, 61, 68; 8th N. Stafford, 65; Queen's Westminsters, 110, 112, 113; 3rd Rifle Brigade, 50; 9th R. Welch Fus., 65; 5th Sherwood Foresters, 139, 141, 142; 6th Sherwood Foresters, 139; 7th Sherwood Foresters, 139, 141, 144; 8th Sherwood Foresters, 113, 139; 11th Sherwood Foresters, 25; 17th Sherwood Foresters, 35; 9th Suffolk, 115, 125, 151, 152, 159; 1st West York, 60, 92, 97, 126; 1st Worcester, 5, 9, 50, 60, 61, 68, 74; 2nd York and Lancaster, 161
Repton, Pte. F., 196
Ridley, Lieut. H., 112; killed, 114
Riley, Drmr. H., 196
Riley, 2/Lieut. H., 66
Rivers, Pte. Jacob, wins V.C., 17; killed, 18
Roberts, Capt., 114, 136, 140-3
Roberts, Drmr. P., 196
Roberts, Lieut. F. C., 114, 131
Roberts, Lieut. C., 134
Roberts, 2/Lieut. J. K. L., 196, 198
Robinson, 2/Lieut. W. M., 26, 29, 31, 35
Robison, 2/Lieut. J. McM., 46
Rogers, 2/Lieut. H. P., 29, 35
Roose, Pte. G. R., 85
Rose, 2/Lieut. T., 127
Rose, Lieut. G. J. J., 180, 191
Ross, Maj.-Gen., 115, 129, 146, 193
Rouges Bancs, fighting at, 19
Rounds, 2/Lieut. R. W., missing, 57

Digitized by Google

Rowe, Co. Sergt.-Major. 128; killed, 142
Rowland, Pte. W., 85
Royce, Co. Sergt.-Major G. N., 94; promoted 2/Lieut., 99, 102, 103; wounded, 105
Rue du Bois, 106
Rundle, Lieut. R. W., 15; missing, 21
Runtz, 2/Lieut. J. C. M., 119; wounded, 127.

St. Amand, 75, 76
St. Jean, 52
St. Nazaire, 2nd Bn., disembarks at, 94
St. Souplet, 184
Salisbury, Boy A. E., 85
Salmon, 2/Lieut. G., 108
Salt, Pte. A. L., 85
Sanctuary Wood, 111, 113
Sandall, 2/Lieut. J. W., 190, 191
Sands, 2/Lieut. C. H., wounded, 35, 39
Sargent, 2/Lieut. H. W., 29, 31, 35
Saunders, 2/Lieut. C. F., 168; wounded, 170
Saunders, Sergt., 11
Savage, Corpl., 196
Savage, Pte., 109
Sawyer, Pte. C., 71, 72
Scheldt Canal, 76
Schneider, Lieut. C. C., 100-2; missing, 103, 105
Scott, Lieut. B. H., 26, 36, 37
Scott, Pte., 9
Seagrave, Co. Q.-M.-Sergt. J., 94
Searle, 2/Lieut. J. A., 41; wounded, 45
Selby, Lieut., wounded, 109
Serocold, Brig.-Gen., 24, 25
Severn, 2/Lieut. F. D., missing, 65
Shacklock, 2/Lieut. G. S., 7; killed, 18
Shannon, 2/Lieut. R. W., 21
Sharp, 2/Lieut., 114, 118
Sharpe, Pte. A., 196
Shaw, 2/Lieut. F. J. M., 26, 29, 31, 35
Shaw, 2/Lieut M. M., 127, 134, 135, 136, 141, 142, 143; Capt., 146, 152, 161; killed, 163, 164
Shawcross, Lieut. R. R., 14, 94
Sheffield, 2nd Bn. at, 92
Sheldon, Lieut. J. V., wounded, 45, 127, 157; Capt., 182, 183, 189, 191, 195, 198
Shelley, Lieut. J. V., 131
Sherbrooke, Lieut. R. L., 1-7, 10; Capt., 21-6, 29; Lieut.-Col., 32, 34, 38, 39, 46; wounded, 49, 55, 128
Shewen, Brig.-Gen. M., 115, 118
Shipman, Sergt.-Drmr. J., 80
Ships, Royal Navy—*Black Prince*, 5; *Dartmouth*, 5; *Indomitable*, 5.
Siddons, 2/Lieut. J. T., 51; missing, 57
Siddons, Pte., 9
Siegfried Line, 74
Simpson, Lieut. O. M., killed, 173
Skeavington, Pte. G. H , 85
Slater, 2/Lieut., 37
Slater, 2/Lieut. A., 127
Slater, Co. Q.-M.-Sergt., 83
Slaughter, Lieut. J. H., 108
Smalley, 2/Lieut. W. M., 7; killed, 10
Smallwood, Pte., 22
Smith, Lieut. B. C., 26, 29
Smith, Lieut. C. E. B. M., 191
Smith, 2/Lieut. E. G., wounded, 61, 98, 102
Smith, 2/Lieut. H. L. C., 94; killed, 105
Smith, 2/Lieut. L., 127
Smith, 2/Lieut. S., 189
Smith, Sergt. W. B., 71
Smith, L./Corpl. J. E., 85
Smith-Dorrien, Gen. Sir H., 12, 19, 34, 86, 92, 96, 108
Smyth, Pte. J., 196
Somme, Battle of, 1916, 30 *et seq.*, 122 *et seq.*; 1918, 54 *et seq.*
Somme offensive, 130, 159 *et seq.*
Souchez Valley, 28
Southampton, 1st Bn. embarks at, 7; 2nd Bn. embarks at, 93, 94
Spatcher, 2/Lieut., 70, 71
Spencer, Pte. H., 80
Spencer, Pte. J. H., 188
Spick, Sergt. W., 196
Spinney, Lieut., 23
Springham, 2/Lieut. L. G. A., 36, 37, 127, 135; wounded, 137
Squires, Lieut. R. D., 1
Squires, L./Corpl., 136
Squires, Drmr. E. R., 188
Stables, 2/Lieut. W. W. G., 26, 29
Stackhouse, Capt. W. T., 7; killed, 17
Stackhouse, Lieut. J. H., 19; wounded, 21
Stamper, 2/Lieut. G., 50; killed, 57
Stamps, 2/Lieut. H. H., 66, 85, 86
Staples, Sergt. J., 131
Steel, 2/Lieut. G. W., 66
Stephenson, 2/Lieut. P., 66
Stevens, Brig.-Gen. L. W., 67
Stevenson, Pte. R., 188
Stimson, 2/Lieut. J. C., 41
Stirland, 2/Lieut. H., missing, 165
Stoneham, 2/Lieut. R. P., 19; killed, 21
Stott, 2/Lieut. H., wounded, 21
Stranger, Lieut. R. H., 1, 5, 7; wounded, 18
Straw, Lieut. A., missing, 65
Street, Capt. E. R., 108; wounded, 114; Major, 119, 124, 126, 128; killed, 129
Stretton, Pte. T., 127
Stribling, 2/Lieut. F. G., 26, 29
Stuart, 2/Lieut. D. M., missing, 65
Swinhoe-Phelan, Capt. W., 1

Tanks, first used, 126
Taylor, Sergt. E. E. S., promoted 2/Lieut., 99; wounded, 105; Lieut., 21; Capt., 26, 29, 31
Taylor, Lieut. F. H., 66
Taylor, Lieut. G. S., 118, 124, 125; killed, 129
Taylor, 2/Lieut. H. G., missing, 165
Taylor, 2/Lieut. J. W. C., 102, 110; killed, 113
Taylor, Major R. J. F., 94, 98, 101
Taylor, Sergt. H., 85
Taylor, Pte. C., 85
Taylor, Pte. S., 117
Temple, 2/Lieut. J. F., wounded, 170
Temple, 2/Lieut. N. S., 21
Tippetts, L./Corpl. H., 85
Tomalin, Co. Q.-M.-Sergt. A. W., 95
Tombazis, 2/Lieut. J. L., 171; wounded, 173; killed, 184
Tomlinson, Capt. and Qrmr. F., 94, 102, 104, 105; Major, 129; Lieut.-Col., 188, 191
Tomlinson, Sgt.-Drmr., 34

Digitized by Google

Toole, Co. Sergt.-Major W., 196
Tower, Lieut. R. B., 100, 101; Capt., 112, 113, 118
Towsey, Lt.-Col., W. Yorkshire Regt., Acting Brigadier, 97, 111, 114
Tournai, 81
Thornton, Capt. P., wounded, 163; missing, 165
Thorpe, Co. Q.-M.-Sergt. H., 94
Thorpe, Regtl. Q.-M.-Sergt. T., 7
Threlfall, 2/Lieut. W. J., 171; wounded, 176
Thrupp, 2/Lieut. R. M., 26; wounded, 27, 31, 35
Thwaites, Maj.-Gen., 139, 143
Transports—*Cardiganshire*, 6, 7; *Georgian*, 93; *Rewa*, 2; *Thongwa*, 3, 4, 5
Tranter, Sergt. E., 85
"Trench Feet," 115
Trench Stores, 106
Trevor-Roper, Lieut. R. D., wounded 176
Trohear, 2/Lieut., 138; wounded, 154
Troops, Regtl. Sergt.-Major A., 94; promoted 2/Lieut., 99, 102; missing, 105
Troyon, 96, 97, 99
Tucker, Lieut. J. P., 27
Tullett, Pte. E. B., 85
Turner, 2/Lieut. E., 51
Turner, Co. Sergt.-Major J., 94
Tutin, 2/Lieut. G. L., 21; Lieut., 66
Tyler, Capt. H. H., killed, 176
Tylden-Wright, Maj. H., 144, 147, 158, 160, 161, 162; wounded, 163, 164

Upton, Corpl. James, wins V.C., 21, 22

Varney, 2/Lieut. L. C., 189, 191
Vaux Andigny, 183, 184
Venner, Capt. G. E., 26, 29; Major, killed, 34, 35
Vieux Berquin, 101
Villers Bretonneux, action of, 59-61
Vimy Ridge, 133
Voce, Sergt. C., 196
Vowler, Lieut. D. F. S., 106

Wakefield, Lieut. M. S., 46; killed, 52
Walker, Lieut. A. C., 46
Walker, Pte. A., 85
Walker, 2/Lieut. H. C. S., killed, 18
Walker, 2/Lieut. J. A., 7
Walker, 2/Lieut. J. E. M., 26, 29
Walker, 2/Lieut. N. A. McD., 29
Walker, 2/Lieut. W., 66
Wallbank, Pte. A. J., 85
Walsh, Lieut. G. P., killed, 114
Walters, L./Cpl., 10, 12
Warburton, 2/Lieut. J., 66
Ward, Co. Sergt.-Maj. F., 95
Wardle, 2/Lieut. C. E., 50; wounded, 57
Wardle, 2/Lieut. J. R., wounded, 57
Waring, Sergt., promoted 2/Lieut., 6
Waters, 2/Lieut., wounded, 17
Watkin, 2/Lieut. A. J., 189, 191
Watson, Maj. T. H., 46, 49, 55; killed, 57
Watson, 2/Lieut. C. T., wounded, 21
Watson, 2/Lieut. J. E., 191
Watts, Gen., 55, 172
Watts, Pte. T. W., 85
Way, Capt. B. G. V., 94, 98, 100
Wayte, Capt. A. B., 20; Maj., 24
Webb, Capt. M. B., 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 14; wounded, 17, 139
Webb, 2/Lieut. G. W., missing, 65
Webb, Drmr. A., 196
Webster, Capt. J. R., 26, 29, 31; wounded, 33-5
Webster, 2/Lieut., wounded, 17
Wedderspoon, 2/Lieut. W. G. F., 106
Weigall, Lieut. R. E. C., 11, 94; wounded, 99; killed, 17
Wells, Boy H. E., 85
Wells, Col.-Sergt. F., promoted 2/Lieut., 6, 7
West, 2/Lieut. W. G., wounded, 21
Westhoek, 48, 49 *et seq.*
Weston, 2/Lieut., 50
Weston, Sergt. W., 123
Wheatley, 2/Lieut. A., 134
Whelton, Pte. E., 80
Whicher, 2/Lieut. J. D'A., 94, 98, 99, 102; wounded, 105; Lieut., wounded, 115, 116
Whitehouse, Col.-Sergt., promoted 2/Lieut., 6
Whitelegg, Lieut. J. S., 134, 138
Widnell, Co. Q.-M.-Sergt., 6
Wieltje, 52, 110, 115, 117
Wildbore, 2/Lieut. H. G., 127, 138, 140, 143
Wilkin, Capt. W. H., 1, 100, 102-5
Wilkinson, Pte., 17
Wilks, L.-Cpl. N., 85
Willcocks, Gen., 21
Willcox, 2/Lieut., 94, 99, 102, 104, 105; Lieut., wounded, 115; Capt., 118, 120
Williams, Pte. A., 188, 196
Williams, 2/Lieut. S. M., killed, 127, 129
Williamson, 2/Lieut. E. M., 1, 5, 7; killed, 16
Willingdon, Lord, Governor of Bombay, 3
Willison, 2/Lieut. A. C., 19, 26, 29; Lieut., 44
Wilson, Gen., 27, 107
Wilson, Maj. W., wounded, 163, 165
Wilson, Pte. A., 85
Wilson, 2/Lieut. E. H., 119
Wilson, Sergt. S., 196
Wilson, Transport-Sergt. G. W., 188
Wolley-Dod, 2/Lieut. C. F., 26, 29, 31
Wood, 2/Lieut. A. J., 191
Woodford, Lieut. C. E. M., 29, 36
Woodhall, Boy W. G., 85
Woolley, 2/Lieut. A. A., 189, 191
Wootten, Pte. C. J., 85
Wragg, 2/Lieut. N. G., 21
Wray, Arm.-Sergt., 7
Wright, Capt. F. E., 138, 141-3
Wright, Lieut. and Qrmr. J., 1, 5, 7
Wright, Pte. G., 196
Wright, Pte. J., 85
Wright, 2/Lieut. J. E., 110; wounded, 114
Wylie, Lieut. J. P., 1, 5, 7, 19; wounded, 21; Maj., 134, 143, 146
Wyncoll, Lieut. H. E. F., 1, 5, 7, 22

Ypres, Third Battle of, 45 et seq., 49, 52, 109 *et seq.*, 166 *et seq.*
Young, Lieut. R. B., 1, 7, 9; Capt., 19, 21

Zonnebeeke, 48

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

NORTH SEA
ENGLISH CHANNEL
(LA MANCHE)
STRAIT OF DOVER
(PAS DE CALAIS)
LILLE
PARIS
BRUXELLES
(BRUSSELS)
ANVERS
(ANTWERP)
GAND
(GHENT)
Rotterdam
Middelburg
Bruges
Ostende
Dunkerque
Calais
Boulogne
Dover
Folkestone
Ramsgate
Margate
Chatham
Sheerness
Harwich
Colchester
Felixstowe
Dovercourt
The Naze
Walton on the Naze
Brightlingsea
Clacton on Sea
Foulness I.
Southend-on-Sea
Shoeburyness
Goodwin Sands
North Foreland
South Foreland
Broadstairs
Deal
Sandwich
Canterbury
Maidstone
Rochester
Chelmsford
Hastings
Eastbourne
Beachy Head
Dungeness
New Romney
Folkestone
Sandgate
Calais
Gravelines
Bourbourg
Dunkerque
Ostende
Zeebrugge
Blankenberghe
Middelkerke
Westende
Nieuport
Furnes
Dixmude
Ypres
Poperinghe
Cassel
Wormhoudt
Bergues
Watten
Audruicq
Guines
Ardres
Wissant
C. Blanc Nez
C. Gris Nez
Mt. Couple
Mt. Lambert
Boulogne
Berck
Le Touquet
Etaples
Montreuil
Hesdin
Frévent
Doullens
Abbeville
St. Valéry-en-Caux
Dieppe
Veules
Fécamp
Cap d' Antifer
Etretat
Les Ifs
Yvetot
Caudebec-en-Caux
Montivilliers
Le Havre
Harfleur
Honfleur
Trouville
Pont-Audemer
Bourg-Achard
Pont l' Evêque
Lisieux
Orbec
Beaumont-le-Roger
Bernay
Evreux
Pacy
Vernon
Les Andelys
Gaillon
Louviers
Elbeuf
Rouen
Darnétal
Maromme
Duclair
Caudebec-les-Elbeuf
Barentin
Yvetot
Clères
Pavilly
Buchy
Forges-les-Eaux
Neufchâtel
Gournay
Beauvais
Clermont
Breteuil
Montdidier
Roye
Albert
Péronne
Bapaume
Arras
Hazebrouck
Bailleul
Armentières
Estaires
Merville
Aire
Lillers
Béthune
La Bassée
Lens
Douai
Valenciennes
Condé
Bouchain
Denain
Le Quesnoy
Avesnes
Maubeuge
Hautmont
Landrecies
Cambrai
Bapaume
Albert
Amiens
Abbeville
Doullens
St. Pol
Hesdin
Montreuil
Berck
Le Crotoy
St. Valery s. Somme
Ault
Eu
Le Tréport
Gamaches
Blangy
Oisemont
Airaines
Picquigny
Molliens-Vidame
Corbie
Villers-Bretonneux
Albert
Péronne
Roisel
Nauroy
Montigny
St. Quentin
Ribemont
Guise
Marly
Etreux
Vervins
Hirson
Signy-le-Petit
Rocroi
Fumay
Givet
Charleville
Mézières
Sedan
Carignan
Florenville
Tintigny
Arlon
Luxembourg
Messancy
Virton
Longwy
Longuyon
Marville
Stenay
Montmédy
Velosnes
Dun
Buzancy
Grandpré
Vouziers
Challerange
Bazancourt
Machault
Pont-Faverger
Somme-Py
Ville-s.-Tourbe
Mesnil
Souain
Perthes
Suippes
Somme-Tourbe
Mourmelon-le-Grd
Verzy
Camp de Châlons
Châlons-sur-Marne
Marson
Vanault-les-Dames
Heltz-le-Maurupt
Vitry-le-François
Sompuis
Ste. Menehould
Clermont en Argonne
Fleury
Souilly
Tilly
Triaucourt
Vanbécourt
Givry-en-Argonne
Reims
Mt. Haut
Mt. Aimé
Rethel
Asfeld
Attigny
Le Chesne
Poix
Vendresse
Raucourt
Bouvellemont
Faissault
Launois
Signy l' Abbaye
Rocroy s. Serre
Fraillicourt
Montcornet
Barenton
Missy
Dizy-le-Gros
Crepy
St. Gobain
Couey-le-Chat
Laon
Fealeux
Sissonne
Nizy-le-Comte
Chateau-Porcien
Anizy-le-Château
La Malmaison
Craonne
Craonnelle
Chemin des Dames
Berry-au-Bac
Guignicourt
Corbeny
Neufchâtel s. Aisne
Soissons
Vic s. Aisne
Vailly
Soupir
Cuisy
Bruyères
Bouvancourt
Braisne-s-Vesle
Fismes
Fismette
Jonchery
Ville-en-Tard.
Fère-en-Tardenois
Ouchy-le-Château
Epernay
Dormans
Condé-en-Brie
Condé-s. Marne
Chartèves
Damery
Cumières
Hautvillers
Ay
Mareuil
Avize
Oger
Le Mesnil
Vertus
Montmort
Etoges
Sézanne
Esternay
Fère-Champenoise
Montmirail
Le Ferté Gaucher
Couilly
Coulommiers
Rebais
Crécy en Brie
Meaux
Lagny
Torcy
Bry
Chelles
Gournay
Neuilly-sur-Marne
Clichy
Montfermeil
Chelles
Vincennes
Charenton
Ivry
Bicêtre
Meudon
Sèvres
Versailles
St. Cloud
Suresnes
Puteaux
Courbevoie
Neuilly
Levallois-Perret
Clichy
St. Denis
Pierrefitte
Stains
Gonesse
Villiers le Bel
Arnouville
Garges
Sarcelles
Ecouen
Montmorency
Enghien
Argenteuil
Bezons
Colombes
Asnières
Bois de Boulogne
Auteuil
Passy
Trocadéro
Champs Elysées
Arc de Triomphe
Montmartre
Batignolles
Clichy
St. Ouen
St. Denis
Aubervilliers
Pantin
Bondy
Noisy-le-Sec
Bobigny
Drancy
Le Bourget
Dugny
Le Blanc Mesnil
Aulnay
Sevran
Livry
Gargan
Clichy-s.-Bois
Montfermeil
Chelles
Lagny
Torcy
Bry
Noisy-le-Grand
Villiers s. Marne
Champigny
Joinville
St. Maur
Charenton
Ivry
Vitry
Choisy le Roi
Villeneuve le Roi
Villeneuve St. Georges
Montgeron
Draveil
Juvisy
Athis
Longjumeau
Massy
Palaiseau
Orsay
Bures
Gif
Chevreuse
Rambouillet
Dourdan
Etampes
Milly
Fontainebleau
Melun
Le Châtelet
Donnemarie en Montois
Provins
Nangis
Mormant
Esbly
Meaux
Trilport
Lizy
Meaux
Jouarre
La Ferté sous Jouarre
Château Thierry
Dormans
Epernay
Condé-en-Brie
Montmirail
Le Ferté Gaucher
Esternay
Sézanne
Fère-Champenoise
Sommesous
Vitry-le-François
Sompuis
Ste. Menehould
Clermont en Argonne
Fleury
Souilly
Tilly
Triaucourt
Vanbécourt
Givry-en-Argonne
Châlons-sur-Marne
Marson
Vanault-les-Dames
Heltz-le-Maurupt
Reims
Mt. Haut
Mt. Aimé
Rethel
Asfeld
Attigny
Le Chesne
Poix
Vendresse
Raucourt
Bouvellement
Faissault
Launois
Signy l' Abbaye
Rocroy s. Serre
Fraillicourt
Montcornet
Barenton
Missy
Dizy-le-Gros
Crepy
St. Gobain
Couey-le-Chat
Laon
Fealeux
Sissonne
Nizy-le-Comte
Chateau-Porcien
Anizy-le-Château
La Malmaison
Craonne
Craonnelle
Chemin des Dames
Berry-au-Bac
Guignicourt
Corbeny
Neufchâtel s. Aisne
Soissons
Vic s. Aisne
Vailly
Soupir
Cuisy
Bruyères
Bouvancourt
Braisne-s-Vesle
Fismes
Fismette
Jonchery
Ville-en-Tard.
Fère-en-Tardenois
Ouchy-le-Château
Epernay
Dormans
Condé-en-Brie
Condé-s. Marne
Chartèves
Damery
Cumières
Hautvillers
Ay
Mareuil
Avize
Oger
Le Mesnil
Vertus
Montmort
Etoges
Sézanne
Esternay

MAP Nº 2

35′ 40′ 45′ 50′ 55′ 4°0′ — 49°30′ — 25′ — 20′ — 15′ — 10′ — 5′

Printed at the War Office by permission of H.M.S.O. 1924.

Geographical Section, General Staff, Nº 2364 (Part of)

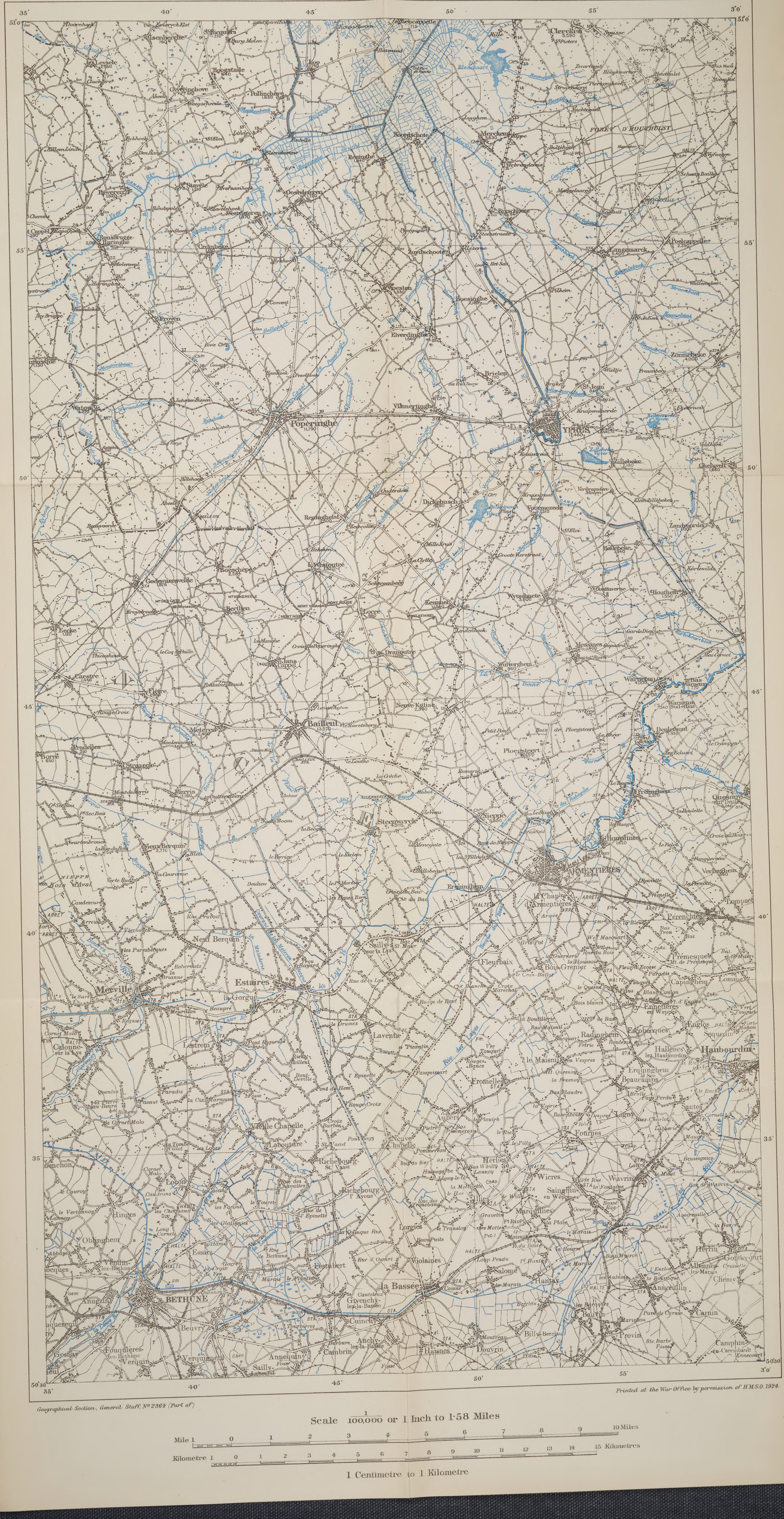
Scale 1/100,000 or 1 Inch to 1·58 Miles

Mile 1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Miles

Kilometre 1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 Kilometres

1 Centimetre to 1 Kilometre

MAP No. 3


35′
40′
45′
50′
55′
3°0′
51°0′
55′
50′
45′
40′
50°30′
35′
Doornhoek
Ysenberghe
760
Leysele
1,550
Hoogstade
640
Gwerinchove
610
Abeele
Pollinchove
1,630
Weegscheede
Eykhoek
Den Hand
Stavele
1,210
Beveren
1,520
Rousbrugge-Haringhe
2,000
Crombeke
Molenwal
Haringhe
Haandekot
Rey Brugge
Proven
1,710
Monaarlbeek
Watou
3,770
Jaheter Biezen
Rattakot
Forge
Hillehoek
Abeele
Abeele Sta.
Beauvoorde
Godewaersvelde
1,876
Eecke
1,120
Caestre
1,440
Fletre
2,950
Rouge Croix
Meteren
2,400
Pradelles
310
Borre
1,650
Strazeele
620
Merris
1,160
Vieux Berquin
2,770
Neuf Berquin
Merville
Calonne-sur la Lys
Lestrem
Estaires
la Gorgue
Laventie
Vieille Chapelle
Lacouture
Richebourg-St. Vaast
Locon
Hinges
Obinghem
Venelin-lez-Bethune
Essars
Festubert
Annezin
BETHUNE
Beuvry
Gosnay
Fouquieres-lez-Bethune
Verquin
Verquigneul
Sailly-Labourse
Annequin
Cambrin
Cuinchy
Givenchy-lez-la-Bassee
la Bassee
Violaines
Lorgies
Haisnes
Douvrin
Billy-Berclau
Provin
Carnin
Camphin-en-Carembault
Ennecourt
Annoeullin
Herrin
Gonnehem
Allennes-les-Marais
Chemy
Wingles
Pont-à-Vendin
Meurchin
Libercourt
Evin-Malmaison
Dourges
Courcelles-les-Lens
Mericourt
Sallaumines
Noyelles-sous-Lens
Harnes
Wingles
Pont-à-Vendin
Meurchin
Libercourt
Evin-Malmaison
Dourges
Courcelles-les-Lens
Mericourt
Sallaumines
Noyelles-sous-Lens
Harnes
Wicres
Wavrin
Sainghin en Weppes
Marquillies
Illies
Lorgies
Salome
Hantay
Bauvin
Provin
Billy-Berclau
Douvrin
Haisnes
Cuinchy
Givenchy-lez-la-Bassee
la Bassee
Violaines
Festubert
Essars
Locon
Hinges
Obinghem
Venelin-lez-Bethune
Annezin
BETHUNE
Beuvry
Gosnay
Fouquieres-lez-Bethune
Verquin
Verquigneul
Sailly-Labourse
Annequin
Cambrin
Auchy-lez-la-Bassee
Givenchy-lez-la-Bassee
Cuinchy
Vieille Chapelle
Lacouture
Richebourg-St. Vaast
Richebourg l'Avoue
Neuve Chapelle
Laventie
Lestrem
Calonne-sur la Lys
Merville
Estaires
la Gorgue
Neuf Berquin
Steenwerck
4,000
Nieppe
5,850
Bailleul
13,570
Meteren
2,400
Pradelles
Borre
Strazeele
Merris
1,160
Vieux Berquin
2,770
Godewaersvelde
1,876
Eecke
1,120
Caestre
1,440
Fletre
2,950
Rouge Croix
Berthen
680
Boeschepe
2,234
Westoutre
1,520
Scherpenberg
Kemmel
1,540
Locre
680
Dranoutre
1,090
Wulverghem
560
Messines
1,400
Warneton
4,000
Bas Warneton
770
Warneton Sud et Bas
340
Deulemont
1,950
Houthem
1,550
Wytschaete
3,600
Ploegsteert
5,000
Neuve Eglise
2,390
Berthen
680
Boeschepe
2,234
Westoutre
1,520
Scherpenberg
Kemmel
1,540
Locre
680
Dranoutre
1,090
Wulverghem
560
Messines
1,400
Warneton
4,000
Bas Warneton
770
Warneton Sud et Bas
340
Deulemont
1,950
Houthem
1,550
Wytschaete
3,600
Ploegsteert
5,000
Neuve Eglise
2,390
Bailleul
13,570
Meteren
2,400
Pradelles
Borre
Strazeele
Merris
1,160
Vieux Berquin
2,770
Godewaersvelde
1,876
Eecke
1,120
Caestre
1,440
Fletre
2,950
Rouge Croix

MAP Nº 4.

2°30′ 3° 3°30′ 4°

50°30′ 50°

Geographical Section, General Staff Nº 2733 (Part of)

Printed at the War Office by permission of H.M.S.O. 1924.

Scale 1 Inch to 3·95 Miles
or 1·014 Inches to 4 Miles.

Miles 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0 5 10 15 20 25 30 Miles

Kilometres 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0 5 10 15 20 25 30 35 40 45 50 Kilometres

1 Centimetre to 2·5 Kilometres

Google